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Fantasy and Science Fiction

35 ¢

FEBRUARY

A TIME TO SURVIVE

a short novel by

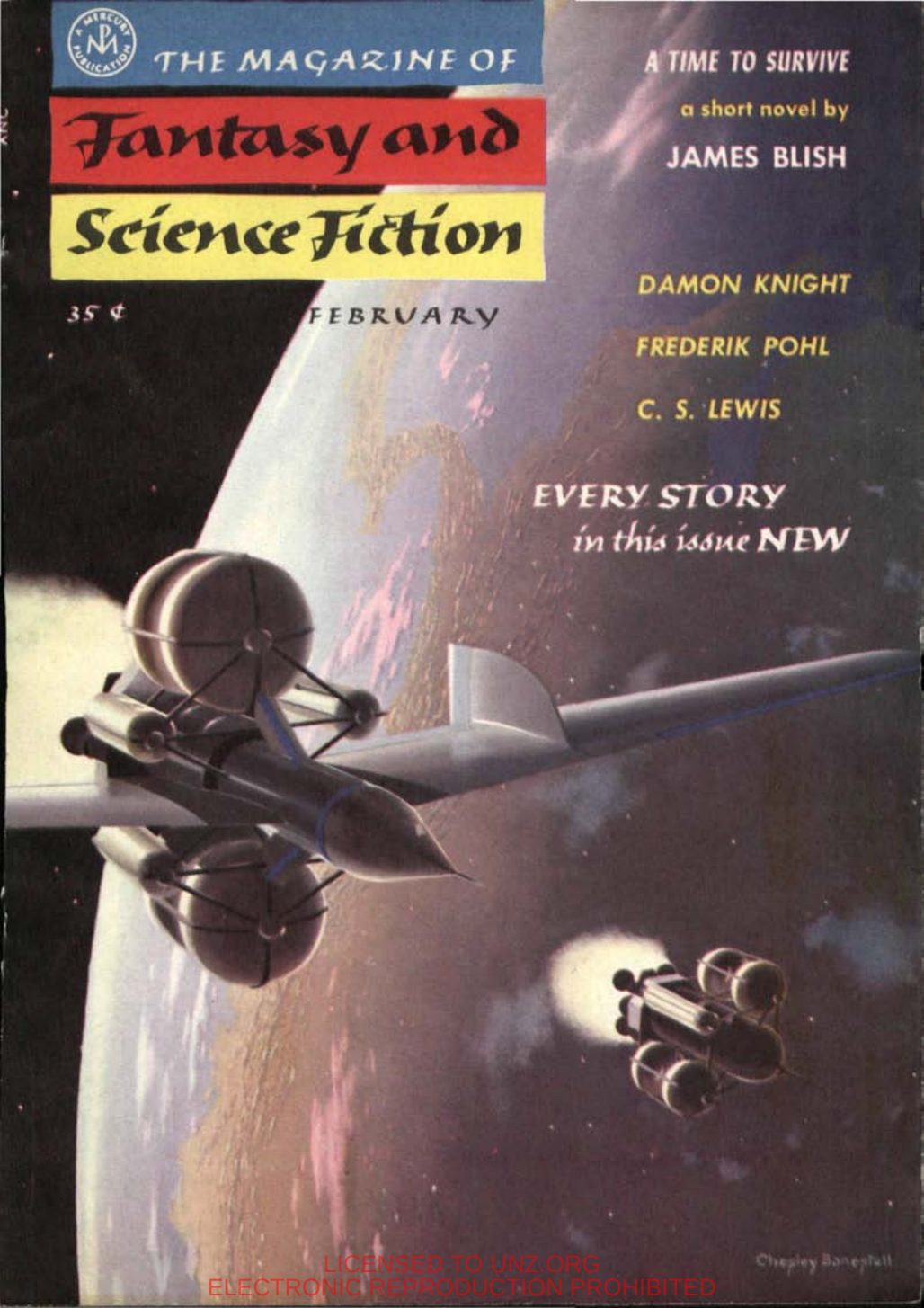
JAMES BLISH

DAMON KNIGHT

FREDERIK POHL

C. S. LEWIS

EVERY STORY
in this issue NEW



Chesley Bonestell

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THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

VOLUME 10, No. 2 FEBRUARY

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COVER PAINTING BY CHESLEY BONESTELL

(1380 miles out from earth on the way to Mars. Ships in plane of ecliptic. South America below. Isthmus of Panama in upper distance.) Painting from "The Exploration of Mars," by Werner von Braun, Willy Ley, and Chesley Bonestell. To be published soon by The Viking Press.

Joseph W. Ferman, PUBLISHER *Anthony Boucher*, EDITOR

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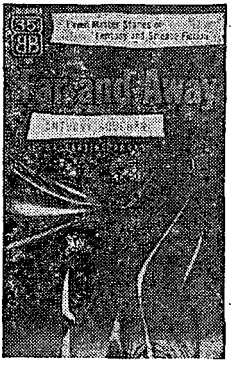

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That amateur but often provocative critic William Atheling, Jr. recently found fault with Eric Frank Russell's Gandhian novella, And Then There Were None, *because it "never comes to grips with what happens to non-violentists when they meet someone who is quite willing to kill them." It's not a simple problem (despite the facile opinions of some draft officials); but it's one that Damon Knight is quite willing to come to grips with. He also examines further a problem which he first studied in* HELL'S PAVEMENT, *that of a civilization in which "all the beauty [is] functional, hygienic, orthopsychiatric; not a particle of expressive-communicative beauty"—and most important, he imbeds these problems in the most breathlessly paced action-story to cross this desk in some time.*

The Country of the Kind

by DAMON KNIGHT

THE ATTENDANT AT THE CAR LOT was daydreaming when I pulled up—a big, lazy-looking man in black satin chequered down the front. I was wearing scarlet, myself; it suited my mood. I got out, almost on his toes.

"Park or storage?" he asked automatically, turning around. Then he realized who I was, and ducked his head away.

"Neither," I told him.

There was a hand torch on a shelf in the repair shed right behind him. I got it and came back. I kneeled down to where I could reach behind the front wheel, and ignited the torch. I turned it on the axle and suspension. They glowed cherry red, then white, and fused together. Then I got up and turned the flame on both tires until the rubberoid stank and sizzled and melted down to the pavement. The attendant didn't say anything.

I left him there, looking at the mess on his nice clean concrete.

It had been a nice car, too; but I could get another any time. And I felt like walking. I went down the winding road, sleepy in the afternoon sunlight, dappled with shade and smelling of cool leaves. You couldn't see the houses; they were all sunken or hidden by shrubbery, or a little of both. That was the fad I'd heard about; it was what I'd come here to see. Not that anything

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the dulls did would be worth looking at.

I turned off at random and crossed a rolling lawn, went through a second hedge of hawthorn in blossom, and came out next to a big sunken games court.

The tennis net was up, and two couples were going at it, just working up a little sweat — young, about half my age, all four of them. Three dark-haired, one blonde. They were evenly matched, and both couples played well together; they were enjoying themselves.

I watched for a minute. But by then the nearest two were beginning to sense I was there, anyhow. I walked down onto the court, just as the blonde was about to serve. She looked at me frozen across the net, poised on tiptoe. The others stood.

"Off," I told them. "Game's over."

I watched the blonde. She was not especially pretty, as they go, but compactly and gracefully put together. She came down slowly flat-footed without awkwardness, and tucked the racket under her arm; then the surprise was over and she was trotting off the court after the other three.

I followed their voices around the curve of the path, between towering masses of lilacs, inhaling the sweetness, until I came to what looked like a little sunning spot. There was a sundial, and a birdbath, and towels lying around on the grass. One couple, the dark-haired pair, was still in sight farther down the path, heads bobbing along. The other couple had disappeared.

I found the handle in the grass without any trouble. The mechanism responded, and an oblong section of turf rose up. It was the stair I had, not the elevator, but that was all right. I ran down the steps and into the first door I saw, and was in the top-floor lounge, an oval room lit with diffused simulated sunlight from above. The furniture was all comfortably bloated, sprawling and ugly; the carpet was deep, and there was a fresh flower scent in the air.

The blonde was over at the near end with her back to me, studying the autochef keyboard. She was half out of her playsuit. She pushed it the rest of the way down and stepped out of it, then turned and saw me.

She was surprised again; she hadn't thought I might follow her down.

I got up close before it occurred to her to move; then it was too late. She knew she couldn't get away from me; she closed her eyes and leaned back against the paneling, turning a little pale. Her lips and her golden brows went up in the middle.

I looked her over and told her a few uncomplimentary things about herself. She trembled, but didn't answer. On an impulse, I leaned over and dialed the autochef to hot cheese sauce. I cut the safety out of circuit and put the quantity dial all the

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way up. I dialed *soup tureen* and then *punch bowl.*

The stuff began to come out in about a minute, steaming hot. I took the tureens and splashed them up and down the wall on either side of her. Then when the first punch-bowl came out I used the empty bowls as scoops. I clotted the carpet with the stuff; I made streamers of it all along the walls, and dumped puddles into what furniture I could reach. Where it cooled it would harden, and where it hardened it would cling.

I wanted to splash it across her body, but it would've hurt, and we couldn't have that. The punch bowls of hot sauce were still coming out of the autochef, crowding each other around the vent. I punched *cancel,* and then *sauterne* (*swt., Calif.*).

It came out well chilled in open bottles. I took the first one and had my arm back just about to throw a nice line of the stuff right across her midriff, when a voice said behind me:

"Watch out for cold wine."

My arm twitched and a little stream of the wine splashed across her thighs. She was ready for it; her eyes had opened at the voice, and she barely jumped.

I whirled around, fighting mad. The man was standing there where he had come out of the stair well. He was thinner in the face than most, bronzed, wide-chested, with alert blue eyes. If it hadn't been for him, I knew it would have worked — the blonde would have mistaken the chill splash for a scalding one.

I could hear the scream in my mind, and I wanted it.

I took a step toward him, and my foot slipped. I went down clumsily, wrenching one knee. I got up shaking and tight all over. I wasn't in control of myself. I screamed, "You — you —" I turned and got one of the punch bowls and lifted it in both hands, heedless of how the hot sauce was slopping over onto my wrists, and I had it almost in the air toward him when the sickness took me — that damned buzzing in my head, louder, louder, drowning everything out.

When I came to, they were both gone. I got up off the floor, weak as death, and staggered over to the nearest chair. My clothes were slimed and sticky. I wanted to die. I wanted to drop into that dark furry hole that was yawning for me and never come up; but I made myself stay awake and get out of the chair.

Going down in the elevator, I almost blacked out again. The blonde and the thin man weren't in any of the second-floor bedrooms. I made sure of that, and then I emptied the closets and bureau drawers onto the floor, dragged the whole mess into one of the bathrooms and stuffed the tub with it, then turned on the water.

I tried the third floor: maintenance and storage. It was empty. I turned the furnace on and set the thermostat up as high as it would go.

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I disconnected all the safety circuits and alarms. I opened the freezer doors and dialed them to defrost. I propped the stair well door open and went back up in the elevator.

On the second floor I stopped long enough to open the stairway door there — the water was halfway toward it, creeping across the floor — and then searched the top floor. No one was there. I opened book reels and threw them unwinding across the room; I would have done more, but I could hardly stand. I got up to the surface and collapsed on the lawn: that furry pit swallowed me up, dead and drowned.

While I slept, water poured down the open stair well and filled the third level. Thawing food packages floated out into the rooms. Water seeped into wall panels and machine housings; circuits shorted and fuses blew. The air conditioning stopped, but the pile kept heating. The water rose.

Spoiled food, floating supplies, grimy water surged up the stair well. The second and first levels were bigger and would take longer to fill, but they'd fill. Rugs, furnishings, clothing, all the things in the house would be waterlogged and ruined. Probably the weight of so much water would shift the house, rupture water pipes and other fluid intakes. It would take a repair crew more than a day just to clean up the mess. The house itself was done for, not repairable. The blonde and the thin man would never live in it again.

Serve them right.

The dulls could build another house; they built like beavers. There was only one of me in the world.

The earliest memory I have is of some woman, probably the creshmother, staring at me with an expression of shock and horror. Just that. I've tried to remember what happened directly before or after, but I can't. Before, there's nothing but the dark formless shaft of no-memory that runs back to birth. Afterward, the big calm.

From my fifth year, it must have been, to my fifteenth, everything I can remember floats in a pleasant dim sea. Nothing was terribly important. I was languid and soft; I drifted. Waking merged into sleep.

In my fifteenth year it was the fashion in love-play for the young people to pair off for months or longer. "Loving steady," we called it. I remember how the older people protested that it was unhealthy; but we were all normal juniors, and nearly as free as adults under the law.

All but me.

The first steady girl I had was named Elen. She had blonde hair, almost white, worn long; her lashes were dark and her eyes pale green. Startling eyes: they didn't look as if they were looking at you. They looked blind.

Several times she gave me strange startled glances, something between fright and anger. Once it was be-

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cause I held her too tightly, and hurt her; other times, it seemed to be for nothing at all.

In our group, a pairing that broke up sooner than four weeks was a little suspect — there must be something wrong with one partner or both, or the pairing would have lasted longer.

Four weeks and a day after Elen and I made our pairing, she told me she was breaking it.

I'd thought I was ready. But I felt the room spin half around me till the wall came against my palm and stopped.

The room had been in use as a hobby chamber; there was a rack of plasticraft knives under my hand. I took one without thinking, and when I saw it I thought, *I'll frighten her.*

And I saw the startled, half-angry look in her pale eyes as I went toward her; but this is curious: she wasn't looking at the knife. She was looking at my face.

The elders found me later with the blood on me, and put me into a locked room. Then it was my turn to be frightened, because I realized for the first time that it was possible for a human being to do what I had done.

And if I could do it to Elen, I thought, surely they could do it to me.

But they couldn't. They set me free: they had to.

And it was then I understood that I was the king of the world. . . .

The sky was turning clear violet when I woke up, and shadow was spilling out from the hedges. I went down the hill until I saw the ghostly blue of photon tubes glowing in a big oblong, just outside the commerce area. I went that way, by habit.

Other people were lining up at the entrance to show their books and be admitted. I brushed by them, seeing the shocked faces and feeling their bodies flinch away, and went on into the robing chamber.

Straps, aqualungs, masks and flippers were all for the taking. I stripped, dropping the clothes where I stood, and put the underwater equipment on. I strode out to the poolside, monstrous, like a being from another world. I adjusted the lung and the flippers, and slipped into the water.

Underneath, it was all crystal blue, with the forms of swimmers sliding through it like pale angels. Schools of small fish scattered as I went down. My heart was beating with a painful joy.

Down, far down, I saw a girl slowly undulating through the motions of sinuous underwater dance, writhing around and around a ribbed column of imitation coral. She had a suction-tipped fish lance in her hand, but she was not using it; she was only dancing, all by herself, down at the bottom of the water.

I swam after her. She was young and delicately made, and when she saw the deliberately clumsy motions

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I made in imitation of hers, her eyes glinted with amusement behind her mask. She bowed to me in mockery, and slowly glided off with simple, exaggerated movements, like a child's ballet.

I followed. Around her and around I swam, stiff-legged, first more child-like and awkward than she, then subtly parodying her motions; then improvising on them until I was dancing an intricate, mocking dance around her.

I saw her eyes widen. She matched her rhythm to mine, then, and together, apart, together again we coiled the wake of our dancing. At last, exhausted, we clung together where a bridge of plastic coral arched over us. Her cool body was in the bend of my arm; behind two thicknesses of vitrin — a world away! — her eyes were friendly and kind.

There was a moment when, two strangers yet one flesh, we felt our souls speak to one another across that abyss of matter. It was a truncated embrace — we could not kiss, we could not speak — but her hands lay confidingly on my shoulders, and her eyes looked into mine.

That moment had to end. She gestured toward the surface, and left me. I followed her up. I was feeling drowsy and almost at peace, after my sickness. I thought . . . I don't know what I thought.

We rose together at the side of the pool. She turned to me, removing her mask: and her smile stopped, and melted away. She stared at me with a horrified disgust, wrinkling her nose.

"*Pyah!*" she said, and turned, awkward in her flippers. Watching her, I saw her fall into the arms of a white-haired man, and heard her hysterical voice tumbling over itself.

"But don't you remember?" the man's voice rumbled. "You should know it by heart." He turned. "Hal, is there a copy of it in the clubhouse?"

A murmur answered him, and in a few moments a young man came out holding a slender brown pamphlet.

I knew that pamphlet. I could even have told you what page the white-haired man opened it to; what sentences the girl was reading as I watched.

I waited. I don't know why.

I heard her voice rising: "To think that I let him *touch* me!" And the white-haired man reassured her, the words rumbling, too low to hear. I saw her back straighten. She looked across at me . . . only a few yards in that scented, blue-lit air; a world away . . . and folded up the pamphlet into a hard wad, threw it, and turned on her heel.

The pamphlet landed almost at my feet. I touched it with my toe, and it opened to the page I had been thinking of:

> . . . sedation until his 15th year, when for sexual reasons it became no longer practicable. While the advisors and medical staff hesitated, he killed a girl of the group by violence.

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And farther down:

The solution finally adopted was three-fold.

1. *A sanction* — the only sanction possible to our humane, permissive society. Excommunication: not to speak to him, touch him willingly, or acknowledge his existence.

2. *A precaution.* Taking advantage of a mild predisposition to epilepsy, a variant of the so-called Kusko analog technique was employed, to prevent by an epileptic seizure any future act of violence.

3. *A warning.* A careful alteration of his body chemistry was effected to make his exhaled and exuded wastes emit a strongly pungent and offensive odor. In mercy, he himself was rendered unable to detect this smell.

Fortunately, the genetic and environmental accidents which combined to produce this atavism have been fully explained and can never again . . .

The words stopped meaning anything, as they always did at that point. I didn't want to read any farther; it was all nonsense, anyway. I was the king of the world.

I got up and went away, out into the night, blind to the dulls who thronged the rooms I passed.

Two squares away was the commerce area. I found a clothing outlet and went in. All the free clothes in the display cases were drab: those were for worthless floaters, not for me. I went past them to the specials, and found a combination I could stand — silver and blue, with a severe black piping down the tunic. A dull would have said it was "nice." I punched for it. The automatic looked me over with its dull glassy eye, and croaked, "Your contribution book, please."

I could have had a contribution book, for the trouble of stepping out into the street and taking it away from the first passer-by; but I didn't have the patience. I picked up the one-legged table from the refreshment nook, hefted it, and swung it at the cabinet door. The metal shrieked and dented, opposite the catch. I swung once more to the same place, and the door sprang open. I pulled out clothing in handfuls till I got a set that would fit me.

I bathed and changed, and then went prowling in the big multi-outlet down the avenue. All those places are arranged pretty much alike, no matter what the local managers do to them. I went straight to the knives, and picked out three in graduated sizes, down to the size of my fingernail. Then I had to take my chances. I tried the furniture department, where I had had good luck once in a while, but this year all they were using was metal. I had to have seasoned wood.

I knew where there was a big cache of cherry wood, in good-sized blocks, in a forgotten warehouse up north at a place called Kootenay. I could have carried some around

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with me — enough for years — but what for, when the world belonged to me?

It didn't take me long. Down in the workshop section, of all places, I found some antiques — tables and benches, all with wooden tops. While the dulls collected down at the other end of the room, pretending not to notice, I sawed off a good oblong chunk of the smallest bench, and made a base for it out of another.

As long as I was there, it was a good place to work, and I could eat and sleep upstairs, so I stayed.

I knew what I wanted to do. It was going to be a man, sitting, with his legs crossed and his forearms resting down along his calves. His head was going to be tilted back, and his eyes closed, as if he were turning his face up to the sun.

In three days it was finished. The trunk and limbs had a shape that was not man and not wood, but something in between: something that hadn't existed before I made it.

Beauty. That was the old word.

I had carved one of the figure's hands hanging loosely, and the other one curled shut. There had to be a time to stop and say it was finished. I took the smallest knife, the one I had been using to scrape the wood smooth, and cut away the handle and ground down what was left of the shaft to a thin spike. Then I drilled a hole into the wood of the figurine's hand, in the hollow between thumb and curled finger. I fitted the knife blade in there; in the small hand it was a sword.

I cemented it in place. Then I took the sharp blade and stabbed my thumb, and smeared the blade.

I hunted most of that day, and finally found the right place — a niche in an outcropping of striated brown rock, in a little triangular half-wild patch that had been left where two roads forked. Nothing was permanent, of course, in a community like this one that might change its houses every five years or so, to follow the fashion; but this spot had been left to itself for a long time. It was the best I could do.

I had the paper ready: it was one of a batch I had printed up a year ago. The paper was treated, and I knew it would stay legible a long time. I hid a little photo capsule in the back of the niche, and ran the control wire to a staple in the base of the figurine. I put the figurine down on top of the paper, and anchored it lightly to the rock with two spots of all-cement. I had done it so often that it came naturally; I knew just how much cement would hold the figurine steady against a casual hand, but yield to one that really wanted to pull it down.

Then I stepped back to look: and the power and the pity of it made my breath come short, and tears start to my eyes.

Reflected light gleamed fitfully on the dark-stained blade that hung from his hand. He was sitting alone

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in that niche that closed him in like a coffin. His eyes were shut, and his head tilted back, as if he were turning his face up to the sun.

But only rock was over his head. There was no sun for him.

Hunched on the cool bare ground under a pepper tree, I was looking down across the road at the shadowed niche where my figurine sat.

I was all finished here. There was nothing more to keep me, and yet I couldn't leave.

People walked past now and then — not often. The community seemed half deserted, as if most of the people had flocked off to a surf party somewhere, or a contribution meeting, or to watch a new house being dug to replace the one I had wrecked. . . . There was a little wind blowing toward me, cool and lonesome in the leaves.

Up the other side of the hollow there was a terrace, and on that terrace, half an hour ago, I had seen a brief flash of color — a boy's head, with a red cap on it, moving past and out of sight.

That was why I had to stay. I was thinking how that boy might come down from his terrace and into my road, and passing the little wild triangle of land, see my figurine. I was thinking he might not pass by indifferently, but stop: and go closer to look: and pick up the wooden man: and read what was written on the paper underneath.

I believed that sometime it had to happen. I wanted it so hard that I ached.

My carvings were all over the world, wherever I had wandered. There was one in Congo City, carved of ebony, dusty-black; one on Cyprus, of bone; one in New Bombay, of shell; one in Chang-teh, of jade.

They were like signs printed in red and green, in a color-blind world. Only the one I was looking for would ever pick one of them up, and read the message I knew by heart.

TO YOU WHO CAN SEE, the first sentence said, I OFFER YOU A WORLD. . . .

There was a flash of color up on the terrace. I stiffened. A minute later, here it came again, from a different direction: it was the boy, clambering down the slope, brilliant against the green, with his red sharp-billed cap like a woodpecker's head.

I held my breath.

He came toward me through the fluttering leaves, ticked off by pencils of sunlight as he passed. He was a brown boy, I could see at this distance, with a serious thin face. His ears stuck out, flickering pink with the sun behind them, and his elbow and knee pads made him look knobby.

He reached the fork in the road, and chose the path on my side. I huddled into myself as he came nearer. *Let him see it, let him not see me*, I thought fiercely.

My fingers closed around a stone.

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He was nearer, walking jerkily with his hands in his pockets, watching his feet mostly.

When he was almost opposite me, I threw the stone.

It rustled through the leaves below the niche in the rock. The boy's head turned. He stopped, staring. I think he saw the figurine then. I'm sure he saw it.

He took one step.

"Risha!" came floating down from the terrace.

And he looked up. "Here," he piped.

I saw the woman's head, tiny at the top of the terrace. She called something I didn't hear; I was standing up, tight with anger.

Then the wind shifted. It blew from me to the boy. He whirled around, his eyes big, and clapped a hand to his nose.

"Oh, what a stench!" he said.

He turned to shout, "Coming!" and then he was gone, hurrying back up the road, into the unstable blur of green.

My one chance, ruined. He would have seen the image, I knew, if it hadn't been for that damned woman, and the wind shifting. . . . They were all against me, people, wind and all.

And the figurine still sat, blind eyes turned up to the rocky sky.

There was something inside me that told me to take my disappointment and go away from there, and not come back.

I knew I would be sorry. I did it anyway: took the image out of the niche, and the paper with it, and climbed the slope. At the top I heard his clear voice laughing.

There was a thing that might have been an ornamental mound, or the camouflaged top of a buried house. I went around it, tripping over my own feet, and came upon the boy kneeling on the turf. He was playing with a brown and white puppy.

He looked up with the laughter going out of his face. There was no wind, and he could smell me. I knew it was bad. No wind, and the puppy to distract him — everything about it was wrong. But I went to him blindly anyhow, and fell on one knee, and shoved the figurine at his face.

"Look —" I said.

He went over backwards in his hurry: he couldn't even have seen the image, except as a brown blur coming at him. He scrambled up, with the puppy whining and yapping around his heels, and ran for the mound.

I was up after him, clawing up moist earth and grass as I rose. In the other hand I still had the image clutched, and the paper with it.

A door popped open and swallowed him and popped shut again in my face. With the flat of my hand I beat the vines around it until I hit the doorplate by accident and the door opened. I dived in, shouting, "Wait," and was in a spiral passage, lit pearl-gray, winding down-

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ward. Down I went headlong, and came out at the wrong door — an underground conservatory, humid and hot under the yellow lights, with dripping rank leaves in long rows. I went down the aisle raging, overturning the tanks, until I came to a vestibule and an elevator.

Down I went again to the third level and a labyrinth of guest rooms, all echoing, all empty. At last I found a ramp leading upward, past the conservatory, and at the end of it voices.

The door was clear vitrin, and I paused on the near side of it looking and listening. There was the boy, and a woman old enough to be his mother, just — sister or cousin, more likely — and an elderly woman in a hard chair holding the puppy. The room was comfortable and tasteless, like other rooms.

I saw the shock grow on their faces as I burst in: it was always the same, they knew I would like to kill them, but they never expected that I would come uninvited into a house. It was not done.

There was that boy, so close I could touch him, but the shock of all of them was quivering in the air, smothering, like a blanket that would deaden my voice. I felt I had to shout.

"Everything they tell you is lies!" I said. "See here — here, this is the truth!" I had the figurine in front of his eyes, but he didn't see.

"Risha, go below," said the young woman quietly. He turned to obey, quick as a ferret. I got in front of him again. "Stay," I said, breathing hard. "Look —"

"Remember, Risha, don't speak," said the woman.

I couldn't stand any more. Where the boy went I don't know; I ceased to see him. With the image in one hand and the paper with it, I leaped at the woman. I was almost quick enough; I almost reached her; but the buzzing took me in the middle of a step, louder, louder, like the end of the world.

It was the second time that week. When I came to, I was sick and too faint to move for a long time.

The house was silent. They had gone, of course . . . the house had been defiled, having me in it. They wouldn't live here again, but would build elsewhere.

My eyes blurred. After a while I stood up and looked around at the room. The walls were hung with a gray close-woven cloth that looked as if it would tear, and I thought of ripping it down in strips, breaking furniture, stuffing carpets and bedding into the oubliette. . . . But I didn't have the heart for it. I was too tired. Thirty years. . . . They had given me all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory thereof, thirty years ago. It was more than one man alone could bear, for thirty years.

At last I stooped and picked up the figurine, and the paper that was supposed to go under it — crumpled

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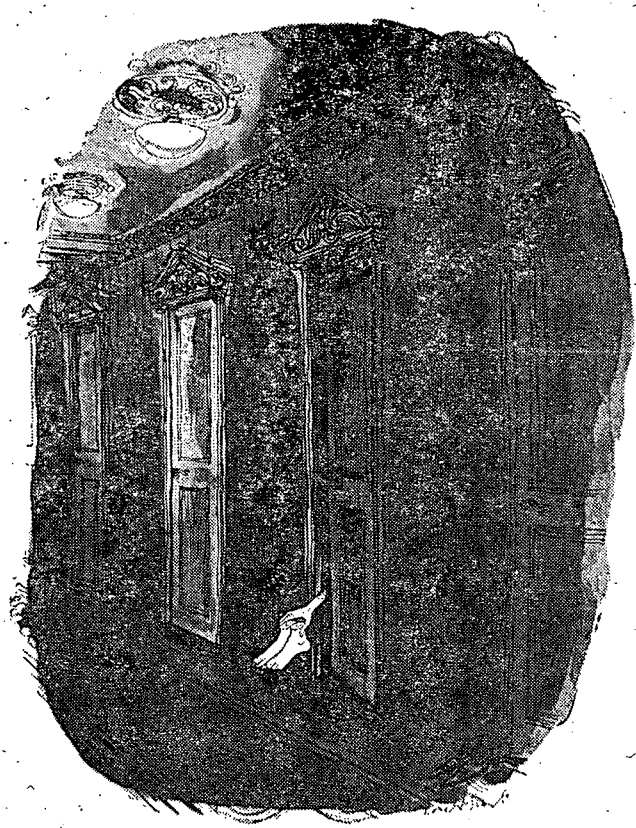
now, with the forlorn look of a message that someone has thrown away unread.

I sighed bitterly.

I smoothed it out and read the last part.

YOU CAN SHARE THE WORLD WITH ME. THEY CAN'T STOP YOU. STRIKE NOW — PICK UP A SHARP THING AND STAB, OR A HEAVY THING AND CRUSH. THAT'S ALL. THAT WILL MAKE YOU FREE. ANYONE CAN DO IT.

Anyone. Someone. Anyone.



Ronald Searle is one of England's best known cartoonists. The cartoon above appeared in his collection, "The Female Approach," copyright, 1954, by Ronald Searle.

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James Blish has explored in other stories the concept of pantropy, *that science springing from the audacious question: Must we adapt the planets to make them habitable to man . . . or can we, genetically, adapt man to the planets? Here he goes back to relate the origin and first success of the pantropic method; and in characteristic Blish fashion, he does so in a short novel which is one part stimulating scientific thinking, one part sympathetic study of character (as a man literally born to be a spy learns to feel emotions that war with his training), and one part sheer rattling adventure, winding up with a doozer of a space battle.*

A Time to Survive

by JAMES BLISH

THE SPACESHIP RESUMED HUMMING around Sweeney without his noticing the change. When Capt. Meiklejon's voice finally came again from the wall speaker, Sweeney was still lying buckled to his bunk in a curious state of tranquility he had never known before, and couldn't possibly have described, even to himself. He had a pulse; otherwise he might have concluded that he was dead. It took him several moments to respond.

"Sweeney, do you hear me? Are — you all right?"

The brief hesitation in the pilot's breathing made Sweeney grin. From Meiklejon's point of view, and that of the most of the rest of humanity, Sweeney was all wrong. He was, for all practical purposes, dead. The heavily insulated cabin, with its own airlock to the outside, and no access for Sweeney at all to the rest of the ship, was a testimonial to his wrongness. So was Meiklejon's tone: the voice of a man addressing, not another human being, but something that had to be kept in a vault.

A vault designed to protect the universe outside it — not to protect its contents from the universe.

"Sure, I'm all right," Sweeney said, snapping the buckle and sitting up. He checked the thermometer, which still registered its undeviating minus 194° F. — the mean surface temperature of Ganymede, moon number III of Jupiter. "I was dozing, sort of. What's up?"

"I'm putting the ship in her orbit; we're about a thousand miles

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up from the satellite now. I thought you might want to take a look."

"Sure enough. Thanks, Mickey."

The wall speaker said, "Yeah. Talk to you later." Sweeney grappled for the guide rail and pulled himself over to the cabin's single bull's-eye port, maneuvering with considerable precision. For a man to whom one sixth Earth gravity is normal, free fall — a situation of no gravity at all — is only an extreme case.

Which was what Sweeney was, too. A human being — but an extreme case.

He looked out. He knew exactly what he would see; he had studied it exhaustively from photos, from teletapes, from maps, and through telescopes at home on the Moon, and on Mars. When you approach Ganymede at inferior conjunction, as Meiklejon was doing, the first thing that hits you in the eye is the huge oval blot called Neptune's Trident — so named by the earliest Jovian explorers because it was marked with the Greek letter ψ on the old Howe Composite map. The name had turned out to have been well chosen: that blot is a deep, many-pronged sea, largest at the eastern end, which runs from about 120° to 165° in longitude, and from about 10° to 33° North latitude. A sea of what? Oh, water, of course — water frozen rock-solid forever, and covered with a layer of rock-dust about three feet thick.

East of the Trident, and running all the way north to the pole, is the great triangular marking called the Gouge, a torn-up, root-entwined, avalanche-shaken valley which continues right around the pole and back up into the other hemisphere, fanning out as it goes. (*Up* because north to space pilots, as to astronomers, is down.) There is nothing quite like the Gouge on any other planet, although at inferior conjunction, when your ship is coming down on Ganymede at the 180° meridian, it is likely to remind you of Syrtis Major on Mars.

There is, however, no real resemblance. Syrtis Major is perhaps the pleasantest land on all of Mars. The Gouge, on the other hand, is — a gouge.

On the eastern rim of this enormous scar, at long. 218° N. lat. 32°, is an isolated mountain about 9,000 feet high, which had no name as far as Sweeney knew; it was marked with the letter π on the Howe map. Because of its isolation, it can be seen easily from Earth's moon in a good telescope when the sunrise terminator lies in that longitude, its peak shining detached in the darkness like a little star. A semicircular shelf juts westward out over the Gouge from the base of Howe's π, its sides bafflingly sheer for a world which shows no other signs of folded strata.

It was on that shelf that the other Adapted Men lived.

Sweeney stared down at the nearly invisible mountain with its

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star-fire peak for a long time, wondering why he was not reacting. Any appropriate emotion would do: anticipation, alarm, eagerness, anything at all, even fear. For that matter, having been locked up in a safe for over two months should by now have driven him foaming to get out, even if only to join the Adapted Men. Instead, the tranquility persisted. He was unable to summon more than a momentary curiosity over Howe's π before his eye was drawn away to Jupiter itself, looming monstrous and insanely colored only 600,000 miles away. And even that had attracted him only because it was brighter; otherwise, it had no meaning.

"Mickey?" he said, forcing himself to look back down into the Gouge.

"Right here, Sweeney. How does it look?"

"Oh, like a relief map. That's how they all look. Where are you going to put me down? Don't the orders leave it up to us?"

"Yeah. But I don't think there's any choice," Meiklejon's voice said, less hesitantly. "It'll have to be the big plateau — Howe's H."

Sweeney scanned the oval mare with a mild distaste. Standing on that, he would be as conspicuous as if he'd been planted in the middle of the Moon's Mare Crisium. He said so.

"You've no choice," Meiklejon repeated calmly. He burped the rockets several times. Sweeney's weight returned briefly, tried to decide which way it wanted to throw itself, and then went away again. The ship was now in its orbit; but whether Meiklejon had set it up to remain put over its present coordinates, or instead it was to cruise criss-cross over the whole face of the satellite, Sweeney couldn't tell, and didn't ask.

"Well, it's a long drop," Sweeney said. "And that atmosphere isn't exactly the thickest in the system. I'll have to fall in the lee of the mountain. I don't want to have to trudge a couple of hundred miles over Howe's H."

"On the other hand," Meiklejon said, "if you come down too close, our friends down there will spot your parachute. Maybe it'd be better if we dropped you into the Gouge, after all. There's so much tumbled junk down there that the radar echoes must be tremendous — not a chance of their spotting a little thing like a man on a parachute."

"*No*, thank you. There's still optical spotting, and a foil parachute looks nothing like a rock spur, even to an Adapted Man. It'll have to be behind the mountain, where I'm in both optical *and* radar shadow at once. Besides, how could I climb out of the Gouge onto that shelf? They didn't plant themselves on the edge of a cliff for nothing."

"That's right," Meiklejon said. "Well, I've got the catapult pointed. I'll suit up and join you on the hull."

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"All right. Tell me again just what you're going to do while I'm gone, so I won't find myself blowing the whistle when you're nowhere around." The sound of a suit locker being opened came tinnily over the intercom. Sweeney's chute harness was already strapped on, and getting the respirator and throat-mikes into place would only take a moment. Sweeney needed no other protection.

"I'm to stay up here with all power off except maintenance for 300 days," Meiklejon's voice, sounding more distant now, was repeating. "Supposedly by that time you'll have worked yourself in good with our friends down there and will know the setup. I stand ready to get a message from you on the fixed frequency. You're to send me only a set of code letters; I feed them into the computer, the comp tells me what to do and I act accordingly. If I don't hear from you after 300 days, I utter a brief but heartfelt prayer and go home. Beyond that, I don't know a thing."

"That's plenty," Sweeney told him. "Let's go."

Sweeney went out his personal airlock. Like all true interplanetary craft, Meiklejon's ship had no overall hull. She consisted of her essential components, including the personnel globe, held together by a visible framework of girders and I-beams. It was one of the longest of the latter, one which was already pointed toward Howe's H, which would serve as the "catapult."

Sweeney looked up at the globe of the satellite. The old familiar feeling of falling came over him for a minute; he looked down, reorienting himself to the ship, until it went away. He'd be going in that direction soon enough.

Meiklejon came around the bulge of the personnel globe, sliding his shoes along the metal. In his bulky, misshapen spacesuit, it was he who looked like the unhuman member of the duo.

"Ready?" he said.

Sweeney nodded and lay face down on the I-beam, snapping the guide-clips on his harness into place around it. He could feel Meiklejon's mitts at his back, fastening the JATO unit; he could see nothing now, however, but the wooden sled that would protect his body from the beam.

"Okay," the pilot said. "Good luck, Sweeney."

"Thanks. Count me off, Mickey."

"Coming up on five seconds. Five. Four. Three. Two. One. Zero."

The JATO unit shuddered and dealt Sweeney a nearly paralyzing blow between his shoulder blades. For an instant the acceleration drove him down into his harness, and the sled spraddled against the metal of the I-beam.

Then, suddenly, the vibration stopped. He was flying free. A little belatedly, he jerked the release ring.

The sled went curving away from

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under him, dwindling rapidly among the stars. The pressure at his back cut out as the JATO unit, still under power, flamed ahead of him. The instantly dissipated flick of heat from its exhaust made him ill for a moment; then it had vanished. It would hit too hard to leave anything where it landed but a hole.

Nothing was left but Sweeney, falling toward Ganymede, head first.

From almost the beginning, from that day unrememberably early in his childhood when he had first realized that the underground dome on the Moon was all there was to the universe for nobody but himself, Sweeney had wanted to be human; wanted it with a vague, impersonal ache which set quickly into a chill bitterness of manner and outlook in his unique everyday life, and in dreams with flares of searing loneliness which became more infrequent but also more intense as he matured, until such a night would leave him as shaken and mute, sometimes for several days at a stretch, as an escape from a major accident.

The cadre of psychologists, psychiatrists and analysts assigned to him did what they could, but that was not very much. Sweeney's history contained almost nothing that was manipulable by any system of psychotherapy developed to help human beings. Nor were the members of the cadre ever able to agree among themselves what the prime goal of such therapy should be: whether to help Sweeney to live with the facts of his essential inhumanity, or to fan instead that single spark of hope which the non-medical people on the Moon were constantly holding out toward Sweeney as the sole reason for his existence.

The facts were simple and implacable. Sweeney was an Adapted Man — adapted, in this instance, to the bitter cold, the light gravity, and the thin stink of atmosphere which prevailed on Ganymede. The blood that ran in his veins, and the substrate of his every cell, was nine tenths liquid ammonia; his bones were Ice IV; his respiration was a complex hydrogen-to-methane cycle based not upon catalysis by an iron-bearing pigment, but upon the locking and unlocking of a double sulfur bond; and he could survive for weeks, if he had to, upon a diet of rock dust.

He had always been this way. What had made him so had happened to him literally before he had been conceived: the application, to the germ cells which had later united to form him, of an elaborate constellation of techniques — selective mitotic poisoning, pinpoint X-irradiation, tectogenetic microsurgery, competitive metabolic inhibition, and perhaps fifty more whose names he had never even heard — which collectively had been christened "pantropy." The word,

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freely retranslated, meant "changing everything" — and it fitted.

As the pantropists had changed in advance the human pattern in Sweeney's shape and chemistry, so they had changed his education, his world, his thoughts, even his ancestors. You didn't make an Adapted Man with just a wave of the wand, Dr. Alfven had once explained proudly to Sweeney over the intercom. Even the ultimate germ cells were the emergents of a hundred previous generations, bred one from another before they had passed the zygote stage like one-celled animals, each one biased a little farther toward the cyanide and ice and everything nice that little boys like Sweeney were made of. The psych cadre picked off Dr. Alfven at the end of that same week, at the regular review of the tapes of what had been said to Sweeney and what he had found to say back, but they need hardly have taken the trouble. Sweeney had never heard a nursery rhyme, any more than he had ever experienced the birth trauma or been exposed to the Oedipus complex. He was a law unto himself, with most of the whereases blank.

He noticed, of course, that Alfven failed to show up when his next round was due, but this was commonplace. Scientists came and went around the great sealed cavern, always accompanied by the polite and beautifully uniformed private police of the Greater Earth Port Authority, but they rarely lasted very long. Even among the psych cadre there was always a peculiar tension, a furious constraint which erupted periodically into pitched shouting battles. Sweeney never found out what the shouting was about because the sound to the outside was always cut as soon as the quarrels began, but he noticed that some of the participants never showed up again.

"Where's Dr. Emory? Isn't this his day?"

"He finished his tour of duty."

"But I want to talk to him. He promised to bring me a book. Won't he be back for a visit?"

"I don't think so, Sweeney. He's retired. Don't worry about him, he'll get along just fine. I'll get you your book."

It was after the third of these incidents that Sweeney was let out on the surface of the Moon for the first time — guarded, it was true, by five men in spacesuits, but Sweeney didn't care. The new freedom seemed enormous to him, and his own suit, only a token compared to what the guards had to wear, hardly seemed to exist. It was his first foretaste of the liberty he was to have, if the many hints could be trusted, after his job was done. He could even see the Earth, where people lived.

About the job he knew everything there was to know, and knew it as second nature. It had been drummed into him from his cold and lonely infancy, always with the

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identical command at the very end: "We must have those men back."

Those six words were the reason for Sweeney; they were also Sweeney's sole hope. The Adapted Men had to be recaptured and brought back to Earth — or more exactly, back to the dome on the Moon, the only place besides Ganymede where they could be kept alive. And if they could not all be recaptured — he was to entertain this only as a possibility — he must at least come back with Dr. Jacob Rullman. Only Rullman would be sure to know the ultimate secret: How to turn an Adapted Man back into a human being.

Sweeney understood that Rullman and his associates were criminals, but how grievous their crime had been was a question he had never tried to answer for himself. His standards were too sketchy. It was clear from the beginning, however, that the colony on Ganymede had been set up without Earth's sanction, by methods of which Earth did not approve (except for special cases like Sweeney), and that Earth wanted it broken up. Not by force, for Earth wanted to know first what Rullman knew, but by the elaborate artifice which was Sweeney himself.

We must have those men back. After that, the hints said — never promising anything directly — Sweeney could be made human, and know a better freedom than walking the airless surface of the Moon with five guards.

It was usually after one of these hints that one of those suddenly soundless quarrels would break out among the staff. Any man of normal intelligence would have come to suspect that the hints were less than well founded upon any real expectation, and Sweeney's training helped to make him suspicious early; but in the long run he did not care. The hints offered his only hope, and he accepted them with hope but without expectation. Besides, the few opening words of such quarrels as he had overheard before the intercom clicked off had suggested that there was more to the disagreement than simple doubt of the convertability of an Adapted Man. It had been Emory, for instance, who had burst out unexpectedly and explosively:

"But suppose Rullman was right —?"

Click.

Right about what? Is a lawbreaker ever "right"? Sweeney could not know. Then there had been the technie who had said "It's the cost that's the trouble with terraforming" — what did that mean? — and had been hustled out of the monitoring chamber on some trumped-up errand hardly a minute later. There were many such instances, but inevitably Sweeney failed to put the fragments together into any pattern. He decided only that they did not bear directly upon his chances of becoming human, and promptly abandoned them in the

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vast desert of his general ignorance.

In the long run, only the command was real — the command and the nightmares. *We must have those men back.* Those six words were the reason why Sweeney, like a man whose last effort to awaken has failed, was falling head first toward Ganymede.

The Adapted Men found Sweeney halfway up the great col which provided the only access to their cliff-edge colony from the plateau of Howe's H. He did not recognize them; they conformed to none of the photographs he had memorized; but they accepted his story readily enough. And he had not needed to pretend exhaustion — Ganymede's gravity was normal to him, but it had been a long trek and a longer climb.

He was surprised to find, nevertheless, that he had enjoyed it. For the first time in his life he had walked unguarded, either by men or mechanisms, on a world where he felt physically at home; a world without walls, a world where he was essentially alone. The air was rich and pleasant, the winds came from wherever they chose to blow, the temperature in the col was far below what had been allowable in the dome on the Moon, and there was sky all around him, tinged with indigo and speckled with stars that twinkled now and then.

He would have to be careful. It would be all too easy to accept Ganymede as home. He had been warned against that, but somehow he had failed to realize that the danger would be not merely real, but — seductive.

The young men took him swiftly the rest of the way to the colony. They had been as incurious as they had been anonymous. Rullman was different. The look of stunned disbelief on the scientist's face, as Sweeney was led into his high-ceilinged, rock-walled office, was so total as to be frightening. He said: "What's this!"

"We found him climbing the col. He must have gotten lost."

"Impossible," Rullman said. "Quite impossible." And then he fell silent, studying the newcomer from crown to toe. The expression of shock dimmed only slightly.

The long scrutiny gave Sweeney time to look back. Rullman was older than his pictures, but that was natural; if anything, he looked a little less marked by age than Sweeney had anticipated. He was spare, partly bald, and slope-shouldered, but the comfortable pod under his belt-line which had shown in the photos was almost gone now. Evidently living on Ganymede had hardened him some. The pictures had failed to prepare Sweeney for the man's eyes: they were as hooded and unsettling as an owl's.

"You'd better tell me who you are," Rullman said at last. "And how you got here. You aren't one of us, that's certain."

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"I'm Donald Leverault Sweeney," Sweeney said. "Maybe I'm not one of you, but my mother said I was. I got here in her ship. She said you'd take me in."

Rullman shook his head. "That's impossible, too. Excuse me, Mr. Sweeney, but you've probably no idea what a bombshell you are. You must be Shirley Leverault's child, then — but how did you get here? How did you survive all this time? Who kept you alive, and tended you, after we left? And above all, how did you get away from the Port Authority? We know that Port found our Moon lab years ago. I can hardly believe that you even exist."

Nevertheless, the scientist's expression of flat incredulity was softening moment by moment. He was, Sweeney judged, already beginning to buy it. And necessarily: there Sweeney stood before him, breathing Ganymede's air, standing easily in Ganymede's gravity, with Ganymede's dust on his cold skin, a fact among inarguable facts.

"The Port cops found the big Dome, all right," Sweeney said. "But they never found the little one, the pilot plant. Dad blew up the tunnel between the two before they landed — he was killed in the rock-slide. Of course I was still just a cell in a jug when that happened."

"I see," Rullman said thoughtfully. "We picked up an explosion on our ship's instruments before we took off. But we thought it was the Port raiders beginning to bomb, unexpected though that was. Then they didn't destroy the big lab either, after all?"

"No," Sweeney said. Rullman must surely know that; radio talk between Earth and Moon must be detectable at least occasionally out here. "There were still some intercom lines left through to there; my mother used to spend a lot of time listening in on what was going on. So did I, after I was old enough to understand it. That was how we found out that the Ganymede colony hadn't been bombed out, either."

"But where did you get your power?"

"Most of it from our own strontium^{90} cell. Everything was shielded so the cops couldn't detect any stray fields. When the cell finally began to give out, we had to tap the Port's main accumulator line — just for a little bit at first, but the drain kept going up." He shrugged. "Sooner or later they were bound to spot it — and did."

Rullman was momentarily silent, and Sweeney knew that he was doing the pertinent arithmetic in his head, comparing the 20-year half-life of strontium^{90} with Sweeney's and the Adapted Men's chronology. The figures would jibe, of course. The Port Authority's briefing had been thorough about little details like that.

"It's still quite astounding, having to rethink this whole episode

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after so many years," Rullman said. "With all due respect, Mr. Sweeney, it's hard to imagine Shirley Leverault going through such an ordeal — and all alone, too, except for a child she could never even touch, a child as difficult and technical to tend as an atomic pile. I remember her as a frail, low-spirited girl, trailing along after us listlessly because Robert was in the project." He frowned reminiscently. "She used to say, 'It's his job.' She never thought of it as anything more than that."

"*I* was her job," Sweeney said evenly. The Port men had tried to train him to speak bitterly when he mentioned his mother, but he had never been able to capture the emotion they wanted him to imitate; he had found, however, that if he rapped out the syllables almost without inflection, they were satisfied with the effect. "You misjudged her, Dr. Rullman — or else she changed after Dad was killed. She had guts enough for ten. And she got paid for it in the end. In the only coin the Port cops know how to pay."

"I'm sorry," Rullman said gently. "But at least you got away. I'm sure that's as she would have wanted it. Where did the ship you mentioned come from?"

"Why, we always had it. It belonged to Dad, I suppose. It was stored in a natural chimney near our dome. When the cops broke into the monitoring room, I went out the other side of the dome, while they were — busy with mother, and beat it. There wasn't anything I could have done —"

"Of course, of course," Rullman said, his voice low and quiet. "You wouldn't have lasted a second in their air. You did the right thing. Go on."

"Well, I got to the ship and got it off. I didn't have time to save anything but myself. They followed me all the way, but they didn't shoot. I think there's still one of them upstairs now."

"We'll sweep for them, but there's nothing we can do about them in any case except keep them located. You bailed out, I gather."

"Yes. Otherwise I wouldn't have had a chance — they seemed to want me back in the worst way. They must have the ship by now, and the coordinates for the colony too."

"Oh, they've had those coordinates for years," Rullman said. "You were lucky, Mr. Sweeney, and bold, too. You bring back a sense of immediacy that I haven't felt for years since our first escape. But there's one more problem."

"What is it? If I can help —"

"There's a test I'll have to make," Rullman said. "Your story seems to hold water; and I really don't see how you could have become what you are, unless you are actually one of us. But we have to be certain."

"Sure," Sweeney said. "Let's go."

Rullman beckoned and led him

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out of the office through a low stone door. The corridor through which they passed was so like all those Sweeney had seen on the Moon that he scarcely bothered to notice it. Even the natural gravity and circulating, unprocessed air were soothing rather than distracting. It was the test that worried Sweeney, precisely because he knew that he would be helpless to affect the outcome. Either the Port Authority's experts had put him together cunningly enough to pass any test, or —

— or he would never have the chance to become human.

Rullman nodded Sweeney through another door into a long, low-ceilinged room furnished with half a dozen laboratory benches and a good deal of glassware. The air was more active here; as on the Moon, there were ventilators roiling it. Someone came around a towering, twisted fractionating apparatus in which many small bubbles orbited, and moved toward them. It was, Sweeney saw, a small glossy-haired girl, with white hands and dark eyes and delicately precise feet. She was wearing the typical technie's white jacket, and a plum-colored skirt.

"Hello, Dr. Rullman. Can I help?"

"Sure, if you can neglect that percolator a while, Mike. I want to run an ID typing; we've got a new man here. All right?"

"Oh, I think so. It'll take a minute to get the sera out." She moved away from them to another desk and began to take out ampoules and shake them before a hooded light. Sweeney watched her. He had seen female technies before, but none so modeled, so unconstrained, or so — so close as this. He felt lightheaded, and hoped that he would not be asked to speak for a little while. There was sweat on his palms and a mumbling of blood in his inner ear, and he thought perhaps he might cry.

He had been plunged into the midst of his untested, long-delayed adolescence, and he liked it no better than anyone ever had.

But his diamond-etched caution did not blur completely. He remembered to remember that the girl had been as little surprised to see him as the two young men who had found him on the col had been. Why? Surely Dr. Rullman was not the only Adapted Man to know everyone in the colony by sight, and hence the only one able to feel consternation at the sight of a strange face. By this time, the settlers on Ganymede should know each others' slightest wrinkles, should have committed to memory every gesture, mannerism, dimple, shading, flaw or virtue that would help them to tell each other from the hostile remainder of overwhelming mankind.

The girl took Sweeney's hand, and for a moment the train of thought fell apart completely. Then

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there was a sharp stab in the tip of his right middle finger, and Mike was expressing droplets of blood into little puddles of bluish solution, spotted in sets of three on a great many slips of thin glass. Microscope slides; Sweeney had seen them before. As for the blood, she could have more if she wanted it. . . .

But he returned doggedly to the question. Why had the young men and Mike failed to be surprised by Sweeney? Was it their age-group that counted? The original colonists of Ganymede would know both each other and their children by sight, while the youngsters to whom everything was essentially new would see nothing strange in a new face.

Children: then the colonists were fertile. There had never been a hint of that, back on the Moon. Of course it meant nothing to Sweeney personally. Not a thing.

"Why, you're trembling," the girl said in a troubled voice. "It was only a little nick. You'd better sit down."

"Of course," Rullman said immediately. "You've been under quite a strain, Mr. Sweeney; forgive me for being so thoughtless. This will be over in just a moment."

Sweeney sat down gratefully and tried to think about nothing. Both the girl and Rullman were now also seated, at the bench, examining with microscopes the little puddles of diluted blood Mike had taken from Sweeney.

"Type O, Rh negative," the girl said. Rullman was making notes. "MsMs, P negative, cDE/cde, Lutheran a-negative, Kell-Cellano negative, Lewis a-minus b-plus."

"Hmm," Rullman said, unilluminatingly. "Also Duffy a-negative, Jk-a, U positive, Jay positive, platelets IV, and non-sickling. A pretty clean sweep. Mean anything to you?"

"It should," she said, looking at Sweeney speculatively. "You want me to match him, then."

Rullman nodded. The girl came to Sweeney's side and the spring-driven lancet went *snick* against another of his finger-tips. After she went back to the bench, Sweeney heard the sound again, and saw her brush her own left middle finger-tip against a slide.

"Compatible, Dr. Rullman."

Rullman turned to Sweeney and smiled for the first time. "You pass," he said. He seemed genuinely glad. "Welcome, Mr. Sweeney. Now if you'll come back to my office, we'll see what we can do about placing you in living quarters, and of course in a job — we've plenty of those. Thanks, Mike."

"You're welcome. Goodbye, Mr. Sweeney. It looks like I'll be seeing a lot more of you."

Sweeney nodded and gulped. It was not until he was back in Rullman's office that he could control his voice.

"What was that all about, Dr. Rullman? I mean, I know you were typing my blood, but what did it tell you?"

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"It told me your bona fides," Rullman said. "Blood groups are inheritable; they follow the Mendelian laws very strictly. Your blood pattern gave me your identity, not as an individual, but as a member of a family. In other words, they showed that you really are what you claim to be, a descendant of Bob Sweeney and Shirley Leverault."

"I see. But you matched me against the girl, too. What did that test?"

"The so-called private factors, the ones that appear only within a family and not in the general population," Rullman said. "You see, Mr. Sweeney, as we reckon such matters here, Michaela Leverault is your niece."

II

For at least the tenth time in two months, Mike was looking at Sweeney with astonishment, troubled and amused at once. "Now where," she said, "did you get *that* idea?"

The question, as usual, was dangerous, but Sweeney took his time. Mike knew that he was always slow to answer questions, and sometimes seemed not to hear them at all. The need for such a protective habit was luridly obvious to Sweeney, and he was only postponing the moment when it should become just as obvious to the Ganymedians; only the plainly pathological introversion of his character as a whole had excused him even thus far from a suspicion that he was ducking the hard ones.

Sooner or later, Sweeney was sure, that suspicion would arise. Sweeney had had no experience of women, but he was nevertheless convinced that Mike was an exceptional sample. Her quickness of penetration sometimes seemed close to telepathy. He mulled the question, leaning on the railing around the ledge below the mountain, looking reflectively into the Gouge, constructing his answer. Each day he had to shorten that mulling-time, though the questions grew no less difficult for his pains.

"From the Port cops," he said. "I've got only two answers to that question, Mike. Anything I didn't get from my mother, I got from spying on the cops."

Mike, too, looked down into the mists of the Gouge. It was a warm summer day, and a long one — three and a half Earth days long, while the satellite was on the sunward side of Jupiter and coming, with Jupiter, closer and closer to the sun. The wind which blew over the flute-mouthpiece of rock on this side of the mountain was as gentle and variable as a flautist's breath, and did not stir the enormous tangled stolons and runners which filled the bottom of the great valley, or the wrap-around leaves which were plastered to them like so many thousands of blue-green Möbius strips.

It was not quiet down there, but

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it seemed quiet. There were many more thrums and rummums of rolling rocks and distant avalanches than one heard during the cold weather. The granite-skinned roots were growing rapidly while their short time was come, burrowing insistently into the walls of the valley, starting new trees and new rocks. In the cliffs, the warm weather changed water-of-crystallization from Ice IV to Ice III, the bound water snapping suddenly from one volume to another, breaking the rock strata apart. Sweeney knew how that worked; that was exfoliation; it was common on the Moon, though its causes there were a little different. But there, too, it caused rock-slides.

All these incessant erratic rumbles and muted thunders were the sounds of high summer in the Gouge. They were as peaceful to Sweeney's ears as bee-buzz is to an Earthman, though he had never encountered bee-buzz except in books. And like growing things everywhere, the terrific gnarled creepers down below sent up into the Adapted Men's air a fresh complacent odor, the specific smell of vegetable battle-unto-death which lulls animal nostrils and animal glands into forgetting past struggles of their own.

Ganymede was, as a matter of fact, a delightful world, even for a dead man. Or solely for a dead man.

"I can't understand why the Port cops would waste time batting lies back and forth," Mike said at last. "*They* knew we weren't doing any commerce-raiding. We've never so much as been off Ganymede since we landed here. And we couldn't get off if we wanted to. Why should they pretend that we did? Why would they talk about it as if it was a fact, especially since they didn't know you were listening? It's senseless."

"I don't know," Sweeney said. "It never entered my head that you *weren't* commerce-raiding. If I'd had any notion that they weren't telling the truth, I'd have listened for clues to tell me why they weren't. But now it's too late; all I can do is guess."

"You must have heard something. Something you don't remember consciously. I can guess, too, but it's your guess that's important. You were listening to them; I wasn't. Try, Don."

"Well," Sweeney said, "maybe they didn't know that what they were saying was untrue. There's no law that says a Port cop has to be told the truth by his bosses. They're back on Earth; I was on the Moon, and so were they. And they sounded pretty convinced; the subject kept coming up, all the time, just casually, as if everybody knew about it. They all believed that Ganymede was raiding passenger liners as far in as the orbit of Mars. It was a settled fact. That's how I heard it."

"That fits," Mike said. Nevertheless, she was not looking at Sweeney; instead, she bent her head farther

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down over the rim of the Gouge, her hands locked together before her in dim space, until her small breasts were resting lightly on the railing. Sweeney took a long breath. The effluvium of the vines suddenly seemed anything but lulling.

"Tell me, Don," she said. "When did you hear the cops begin to talk this subject up? For the first time?"

His veering attention snapped back into the frigid center of his being so suddenly that it left behind a bright weal, as if a lash had been laid across his exposed brain. Mike was dangerous; dangerous. He had to remember that.

"When?" he said. "I don't know, Mike. The days were all alike. It was towards the end, I think. When I was a kid I used to hear them talk about us as if we were criminals, but I couldn't figure out why. I guessed that it was because we were different, that's all. It was only at the end that they began to talk about specific crimes, and even then it didn't make much sense to me. My mother and I hadn't ever pirated any ships, that was for sure."

"Only at the last. That's what I thought. They began to talk like that for the first time when your power began to fail. Isn't that right?"

Sweeney gave that one a long think, at least twice as long as would ordinarily have been safe before Mike. He already knew where Mike's questions were leading him. In this instance, a quick answer would be fatal; he had to appear to be attempting, with some pain, to dredge up information which was meaningless to him. After a while, he said:

"Yes, it was about then. I was beginning to cut down on tapping their calls; it didn't take much power, but we needed all we had. Maybe I missed hearing the important parts, that's possible."

"No," Mike said grimly. "I think you heard all of it. Or all you were meant to hear. And I think you interpreted what you heard in exactly the way they wanted you to, Don."

"That's possible," Sweeney said slowly. "I was only a kid. I would have taken what I heard at face value. But that would mean that they knew we were there. I wonder; I don't remember exactly, but I don't think we had begun to sneak power from them yet. We were still thinking about putting a suncell on the surface, in those days."

"No, no. They must have known you were there for years before you began to tap their power. Rullman's been talking about that lately. There are simple ways of detecting even a phone-line tap, and your strontium battery couldn't have been undetected very long, either. They waited only until they could be sure they'd get you when they finally raided you. It's the way they think. In the meantime, they fed you hokum when you eavesdropped."

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So much for the story the cops had told Sweeney to tell. Only the extreme of stupidity which it assumed in the Adapted Men had protected it this long; nobody defends himself, at least at first, upon the assumption that his opponent thinks he is a microcephalic idiot. The deception had lasted two months, but it would never last 300 days.

"Why would they do that?" Sweeney said. "They were going to kill us as soon as they could — as soon as they could work out a way to do it without damaging our equipment. What did they care what we thought?"

"Torture," Mike said, straightening and locking her hands around the railing with the automatic tetanus of a bird's claws touching a perch. She looked across the Gouge at the distant, heaped range on the other side. "They wanted you to think that everything your people had planned and done had come to nothing — that we had wound up as nothing but vicious criminals. Since they couldn't get to you and your mother immediately, they amused themselves with strafing you while they worked. Maybe they thought it'd help soften you up — goad you into making some mistake that would make the job of getting in to you easier. Or maybe they did it just because they enjoyed it. Because it made them feel good."

After a short silence, Sweeney said, "Maybe that was it. Maybe not. I don't know, Mike."

She turned to him suddenly and took him by the shoulders. Her eyes were crystal blue. "How could you know?" she said, her fingers digging into his deltoid muscles. "How could you know *anything* when there was nobody to tell you? The Earth must be full of lies about us now — lies, and nothing but lies! You've got to forget them — forget them all — just as though you'd just been born. You *have* just been born, Don, believe me. Only just. What they fed you on the Moon was lies; you've got to start learning the truth here, learning it from the beginning."

She held him a moment longer. She was actually shaking him. Sweeney did not know what to say; he did not even know what emotion to mimic. The emotion he felt was still almost unknown; he did not dare let it show, let alone let it loose. While the girl looked furiously into his eyes, he could not even blink.

After all, he really had been born some time ago. Born dead.

The painful tenfold pressure on his shoulders changed suddenly to a residual tingling over a deep ache, and Mike's hands dropped to her sides. She looked away, across the Gouge again. "It's no use," she said indistinctly. "I'm sorry. That's a hell of a way for a girl to talk to her uncle."

"That's all right, Mike. I was interested."

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"I'm sure of it. . . . Let's go for a walk, Don. I'm sick of looking into the Gouge." She was already striding back toward the looming mountain under which the colony lived.

Sweeney watched her go, his icy blood sighing in his ears. It was terrible to be unable to think; he had never known the dizziness of it until he had met Mike Leverault, but now it seemed determined never to leave him — it abated sometimes, but it never quite went away. He had been ruefully glad, at the very beginning, that the close "blood" tie between himself and Mike, a genetic tie which was quite real since he was in fact Shirley Leverault's Adapted son, would prevent his becoming interested in the girl in accordance with the Earth custom. But in fact it had had no such effect. Earth tabus had no force for him; and here on Ganymede, that particular tabu had been jettisoned summarily. Rullman had told him why.

"Don't give it a second thought," he had said on that very first day, grinning into Sweeney's stunned face. "We haven't any genetic reasons for forbidding inbreeding; quite the contrary. In a small group like ours, the strongest and most immediate evolutionary influence is genetic drift. Unless we took steps to prevent it, there'd be a loss of unfixed genes with every new generation. Obviously we can't allow that, or we'd wind up with a group in which there'd be no real individuals: everybody would be alike in some crucial and absolutely unpredictable respect. No tabu is worth that kind of outcome."

Rullman had gone on from there. He had said that simply permitting inbreeding could not in itself halt genetic drift; that in some respects it encouraged it; and that the colony was taking positive measures to circumvent drift, measures which would begin to bear fruit within eight generations. He had begun by this time to talk in terms of alleles and isomorphs and lethal recessives, and to write *rrR:rRR/('rA)rr/R'Rr* and like cryptograms on the sheet of mica before him; and then, suddenly, he had looked up and realized that he had lost his audience. That, too, had amused him.

Sweeney had not minded. He knew he was ignorant. Besides, the colony's plans meant nothing to him; he was on Ganymede to bring the colony to an end. As far as Mike was concerned, he knew that nothing would govern him but his monumental loneliness, as it governed everything he did and felt.

But he had been astonished to discover that, covertly at least, that same loneliness governed everyone else in the colony, with the sole possible exception of Rullman.

Mike looked back, and then, her face hardening, quickened her pace. Sweeney followed, as he knew he had to; but he was still struggling to think.

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Much of what he had learned about the colony, if it was true — and at least everything he had been able to check had passed that test — had involved his unlearning what he had been taught by the Port cops. The cops, for instance, had said that the alleged commerce-raiding had had two purposes: secondarily to replenish food and equipment, but primarily to augment the colonist's numbers by capturing normal people for Adaptation.

There was no commerce-raiding going on now, that much was certain, and Sweeney was inclined to believe Mike's denial that there had ever been any in the past. Once one understood the ballistics of space-travel, one understood also that piracy is an impossible undertaking, simply because it is more work than it is worth. But beyond this persuasive objection, there was the impossibility of the motive the Port cops had imputed to the Ganymedians. The primary purpose was nonsense. The colonists were fertile, and hence did not need recruits; and besides, it was impossible to convert a normal adult human into an Adapted Man — pantropy had to begin before conception, as it had been begun with Sweeney.

Calamitously, the reverse also appeared to be true. Sweeney had been unable to find anybody in the colony who believed it possible to convert an Adapted Man back into a human being. The promise the Port cops had held out to him — though they had never made it directly — thus far appeared to be founded upon nothing better than dust. If it were nevertheless possible to bring a man like Sweeney back to life, only Rullman knew about it, and Sweeney had to be hypercautious in questioning Rullman. The scientist had already made some uncomfortable deductions from the spares facts and ample lies with which Sweeney had, by order of the Port cops, provided him. Like everyone else on Ganymede, Sweeney had learned to respect the determination and courage which were bodied forth in everything Rullman did and said; but unlike anybody else on Ganymede, Sweeney feared Rullman's understanding.

And in the meantime — while Sweeney waited, with a fatalism disturbed only by Mike Leverault, for Rullman to see through him to the other side of the gouge which was Sweeney's frigid tangled substitute for a human soul — there remained the question of the crime.

We must have those men back.

Why?

Because we need to know what they know.

Why not ask them?

They won't tell us.

Why not?

Because they're afraid.

Why are they afraid?

Because they committed a crime.

Why should that make them afraid?

Because they must be punished.

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Why?

SILENCE

So the question of the crime still remained. It had not been commerce-raiding; even had the Ganymedians achieved the impossible and had pirated spacecraft, that would not have been the *first* crime, the one which had made the Adapted Men flee to Ganymede in the first place, the crime from which the whole technique of pantropy had sprung. What high crime had the parents of the Adapted Men committed, to force them to maroon their children on Ganymede for what they must have believed was to be forever?

The responsibility was not the children's, that much was also obvious. The children had never been on the Earth at all. They had been born and raised on the Moon, in strict secrecy. The cops' pretense that the colonists themselves were wanted back for some old evil was another fraud, like the story about commerce raiding. If a crime had been committed on Earth, it had been committed by the normal Earthmen whose frigid children roamed Ganymede now; it could have been committed by no one else.

Except, of course, by Rullman. Both on the Moon and on Ganymede it was the common assumption that Rullman had been an Earth-normal human being once. That was impossible, but it was agreed to be so. Rullman himself turned the question away rather than deny it. Perhaps the crime had been his alone, since there was nobody else who could have committed it.

But *what* crime? Nobody on Ganymede could, or would, tell Sweeney. None of the colonists believed in it. Most of them thought that nothing was held against them but their difference from normal human beings; the exceptional few thought that the development of pantropy itself was the essential crime. Of that, clearly, Rullman was guilty, if "guilty" was the applicable word.

Why pantropy, or the responsibility for developing it, should be considered criminal was a mystery to Sweeney, but there was a great deal else that he didn't know about Earth laws and standards, so he wasted no more time in puzzling over it. If Earth said that inventing pantropy was a crime, that was what it was; and the Port cops had already told him that he must not fail to bring back Rullman, no matter how grievously he failed to fulfill all his other instructions. It was an answer, and that was enough.

But why hadn't the cops said so in the first place? And why, if pantropy was a crime, had the cops themselves compounded that identical crime — by creating Sweeney?

Belatedly, he quickened his pace. Mike had already disappeared under the lowering brow of the great cavern. He could not remember noticing, now, which of the dozen smaller entrances she had used, and he himself did not know where more than two of them led. He chose one.

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Four turns later, he was hopelessly lost.

This was unusual, but it was not entirely unexpected. The network of tunnels under Howe's π was a labyrinth, not only in fact but by intention. In drilling out their home, the Adapted Men had taken into consideration the possibility that gun-carrying men in spacesuits might some day come looking for them. Such a man would never find his way out from under the mountain, unless an Adapted Man who had memorized the maze led him out; and he would never find an Adapted Man, either. Memorization was the only key, for no maps of the maze existed, and the colonists had a strictly enforced law against drawing one.

Sweeney had perhaps half of the maze committed to memory. If he did not meet someone he knew — for after all, nobody was hiding from *him* — he could count upon entering a familiar section sooner or later. In the meantime, he was curious to see anything that there was to be seen.

The first thing of interest that he saw was Dr. Rullman. The scientist emerged from a tunnel set at a 20° angle to the one Sweeney was in at the moment, going away from Sweeney and unaware of him. After an instant's hesitation, Sweeney followed him, as silently as possible. The noisy ventilation system helped to cover his footfalls.

Rullman had a habit of vanishing for periods ranging from half a day to a week. Anybody who knew where he went and what he did there did not talk about it. Now was a chance, perhaps, for Sweeney to find out for himself. It was possible, of course, that Rullman's disappearances were related to the forthcoming meteorological crisis on Ganymede, about which Sweeney had been hearing an increasing number of hints. On the other hand . . . what was on the other hand? There could be no harm in investigating.

Rullman walked rapidly, his chin ducked into his chest, as though he were traveling a route so familiar that habit could be entrusted with carrying him along it. Once Sweeney almost lost him, and thereafter cautiously closed up the interval between them a little; the labyrinth was sufficiently complex to offer plenty of quick refuges should Rullman show signs of turning back. As the scientist moved, there came from him an unpredictable but patterned series of wordless sounds, intoned rather than spoken. They communicated nothing, actuated no mechanisms, gave Rullman no safe-conduct — as was evidenced by the fact that Sweeney was traveling the same course without making any such noise. Indeed, Rullman himself seemed to be unaware that he was making it.

Sweeney was puzzled. He had never heard anybody hum before.

The rock beneath Sweeney's feet began to slope downward, gently

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but definitely. At the same time, he noticed that the air was markedly warmer, and was becoming more so with almost every step. A dim sound of laboring machinery was pulsing in it.

It got hotter, and still hotter, but Rullman did not hesitate. The noise — which Sweeney could now identify definitely as that of pumps, many of them — also increased. The two men were now walking down a long, straight corridor, bordered by closed doors rather than maze exits; it was badly lit, but Sweeney nevertheless allowed Rullman to get farther ahead of him. Toward the other end of this corridor, the heat began to diminish, to Sweeney's relief, for he had begun to feel quite dizzy. Rullman gave no indication that he even noticed it.

At this end Rullman ducked abruptly into a side entrance which turned out to be the top of a flight of stone steps. Quite a perceptible draft of warm air was blowing down it. Warm air, Sweeney knew, was supposed to rise in a gravitational field; why it should be going in the opposite direction he could not imagine, especially since there appeared to be no blowers in operation on this level. Since it was blowing toward Rullman, it would also carry any noise Sweeney made ahead of him. He tiptoed cautiously down.

Rullman was not in sight when Sweeney left the stairwell. There was before Sweeney, instead, a high, high-ceilinged passageway which curved gently to the right until vision was cut off. Along the inside of the curve, regularly spaced, were crouching machines, each one with a bank of laterally-coiled metal tubing rearing before it. These were the sources of the sounds Sweeney had heard.

Here it was cold again; abnormally cold, despite the heavy current of warm air blowing down the stairwell. Something, Sweeney thought, was radically wrong with the behavior of the thermodynamic laws down here.

He slouched cautiously ahead. After only a few steps, past the first of the laboring mechanisms — yes, it was coldest by the shining coils, as if cold were actually radiating from them — he found an undeniable airlock. Furthermore, it was in use: the outer door was sealed, but a little light beside it said that the lock was cycling. Opposite the lock, on the other wall, one of a row of spacesuit lockers hung open and tenantless.

But it was the legend painted on the airlock valve which finally made everything fall into place. It said:

PANTROPE LABORATORY ONE
Danger — Keep Out!

Sweeney dodged away from the airlock with a flash of pure panic, as a man wanted for murder might jump upon seeing a sign saying "50,000 volts." It was all clear now. There was nothing wrong with the thermodynamics of this corridor that

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was not similarly "wrong" inside any refrigerator. The huge engines were pumps, all right — heat pumps. Their coils were frost-free only because there was no water vapor in Ganymede's air; nevertheless, they were taking heat from that air and transferring it to the other side of that rock wall, into the pantrope lab.

No wonder the laboratory was sealed off from the rest of the maze by an airlock — and that Rullman had had to put on a spacesuit to go through it.

It was hot on the other side. Too hot for an Adapted Man.

But *what* Adapted Man?

What good was pantropy to Rullman here? That phase of history was supposed to be over and done with. Yet what was going on in this laboratory obviously was as alien to the environment of Ganymede as Ganymede's environment was to Earth's.

A is to B as B is to — what? To C? Or *to A?*

Was Rullman, in the face of the impossibility of such a project, *trying to re-adapt his people to Earth?*

There should be dials on this side of the wall which would give more information as to what it was like on the other side. And there they were, in a little hooded embrasure which Sweeney had overlooked in the first shock. They said:

59	614
	-30
Degrees F.	Millibars
47	140
Dew Point	o_2 Tens mm Hg

Some of these meant nothing to Sweeney: he had never before encountered pressure expressed in millibars, let alone the shorthand way it was registered by the dial before him; nor did he know how to compute relative humidity from the dew point. With the Fahrenheit scale he was vaguely familiar, vaguely enough to have forgotten how to convert it into Centigrade readings. But —

Oxygen tension!

There was one planet, and one only, where such a measurement could have any meaning.

Sweeney ran.

He was no longer running by the time he reached Rullman's office, although he was still thoroughly out of breath. Knowing that he would be unable to cross back over the top of the pantrope lab again, feeling that heat beating up at him and knowing at least in part what it meant, he had gone in the opposite direction, past the gigantic heat-exchangers, and blundered his way up from the other side. The route he had followed had covered over three erratic miles, and several additional discoveries which had shaken him almost as hard as had the first one.

He was entirely unsure that he was even rational any more. But he had to know. Nothing was important to him now but the answer to

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the main question, the permanent founding or dashing of the hope under which he had lived so long.

Rullman was already back in the office, almost surrounded by his staff. Sweeney pushed his way forward among the Ganymedians, his jaw set, his diaphragm laboring.

"This time we're going to close all the safety doors," Rullman said into the phone. "The pressure fronts are going to be too steep to allow us to rely on the outside locks alone. See to it that everybody knows where he's to be as soon as the alert sounds, and this time make it stick; we don't want anybody trapped between doors for the duration. This time it may swoop down on us at damn short notice."

The phone murmured and cut out.

"Hallam, how's the harvesting? You've got less than a week, you know."

"Yes, Dr. Rullman. We'll be through in time."

"And another thing — oh, hello, Donald. What's the matter? You're looking a little pasty. I'm pretty busy, so make it fast, please."

"I'll make it fast," Sweeney said. "I can put it all into one question if I can talk to you privately. For just a few seconds."

Rullman's reddish eyebrows went up, but after examining Sweeney's face more closely, the scientist nodded and rose. "Come next door, then. . . . Now then, youngster, spit it out. With this storm coming up, we don't have time for shillyshallying."

"All right," Sweeney said, taking a long breath. "This is it: Is it possible to change an Adapted Man back into a human being? An Earth-normal human being?"

Rullman's eyes narrowed very slowly; and for what seemed a long time, he said nothing. Sweeney looked back. He was afraid, but he was not afraid of Rullman.

"You've been down below, I see," the scientists said at last, drumming at the base of his chin with two fingers. "And from the terms you use, it strikes me that Shirley Leverault's educational methods left — well, the cliché springs to mind — something to be desired. But we'll let those things pass for now.

"The answer to your question, in any case, is: *No.* You will never be able to live a normal life in any other place than Ganymede, Donald. And I'll tell you something else that your mother should have told you: You ought to be damned glad of it."

"Why should I?" Sweeney said, almost emotionless.

"Because, like every other person in this colony, you have a Jay-positive blood type. This we told you, the first day you joined us, but evidently it didn't register — or didn't mean anything to you. Jay-positive blood is of no significance on Ganymede — but *Jay-positive Earth-normal people are cancer-prones.* They are as susceptible to cancer as hemophiliacs are to bleeding to death — and upon equally short notice.

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"If by some miracle you *should* be changed to an Earth-normal man, Donald, you would be under immediate sentence of death. So I say you should be glad that it can't happen — damn glad!"

III

The crisis on Ganymede — though of course it would not even be an incident, were there nobody there to live through it — comes to fruition roughly every eleven years and nine months. It is at the end of this period that Jupiter — and hence his fifteen-fold family of moons and moonlets — makes his closest approach to the Sun.

The eccentricity of Jupiter's orbit is only 0.0484, which amounts to very little for an ellipse which averages 483,300,000 miles from its focal points. Nevertheless, at perihelion Jupiter is nearly ten million miles closer to the sun than he is at aphelion; and the weather on Jupiter, never anything less than hellish, becomes indescribable during that approach. So, on a smaller but sufficient scale, does the weather on Ganymede.

The perihelion temperature on Ganymede never rises high enough to melt the ice of Neptune's Trident, but it does lift through the few niggardly degrees necessary to make the vapor pressure of Ice III known in Ganymede's air. Nobody on Earth could dream of calling the resulting condition "humidity," but Ganymede's weather turns upon such microscopic changes; an atmosphere containing *no* water will react rapidly to even a fractional vapor content. For one thing, it will pick up more heat. The resulting cycle does not go through more than a few turns before it flattens out, but the end-product is no less vicious.

The colony, Sweeney gathered, had come through one such period without any but minor difficulties, simply by withdrawing entirely under the mountain; but for many reasons that course was no longer possible. There were now semi-permanent installations — weather stations, observatories, radio beacons, bench-mark and other surveying centers — which could be dismantled only with the loss of much time before the crisis, and re-established with still more loss afterwards. Furthermore, some of the colonists would be needed to report and record the progress of the crisis itself, and hence had to stay where they were.

"And don't get the idea," Rullman told a mass meeting of the colonists, gathered in the biggest cavern of the maze, "that even the mountain can protect us all the way through this one. I've told you before, but I'll remind you again, that the climax this year coincides with the peak of the sunspot cycle. Everybody's seen what that does to the weather on Jupiter proper. We can expect similar effects, to scale, on Ganymede. There's going to be trouble no matter how well we pre-

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pare. All we can hope for is that the inevitable damage will be minor. Anybody who thinks we're going to get off scot-free has only to listen for a minute."

In the calculated, dramatic pause which followed, everybody listened. The wind was audible even down here, howling over the outlets and intakes of the ventilation system, carried, amplified and encrusted with innumerable echoes, by the metal miles of the air ducts. The noise was a reminder that, at the height of the coming storms, the exterior ports would all be closed, so that everyone under the mountain would have to breathe recirculated air. After a moment, a mass sigh — an involuntary intake of breath against the easily imagined future — passed through Rullman's audience. He grinned.

"I don't mean to frighten you," he said. "We'll get along. But I don't want any complacency either, and above all, I won't stand for any sloppiness in the preparations. It's particularly important that we keep the outside installations intact this time, because we're going to need them before the end of the next Jovian year — a long time before that, if everything continues to go well."

The grin was suddenly quenched. "I don't need to tell some of you how important it is that we get that project completed on schedule," Rullman said quietly. "We may not have much time left before the Port cops decide to move in on us — it amazes me that they haven't already done so, particularly since we're harboring a fugitive the cops troubled to chase almost into our atmosphere — and we can't plan on their giving us any leeway.

"For those of you who know about the project only in outline, let me emphasize that there is a good deal more hanging from it than immediately meets the eye. Man's whole future in space may be determined by how well we carry it off; we can't afford to be licked — neither by the Earth nor by the weather. If we are, our whole long struggle for survival will have been meaningless. I'm counting on everyone here to see to it that that doesn't happen."

It was difficult to be sure of what Rullman was talking about when he got onto the subject of the "project." It had something to do with the pantrope labs, that much was clear; and it had to do also with the colony's original spaceship, which Sweeney had run across that same day, stored in a launching tunnel almost identical with the one on the Moon out of which Sweeney had rocketed to begin his own free life, and fitted — if judgment based upon a single brief look could be trusted — either for a long voyage by a few people, or for a short trip by a large group.

Beyond that, Sweeney knew nothing about "the project," except for one additional fact of which he could make nothing: it had something to

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do with the colony's long-term arrangements for circumventing the loss of unfixed genes. Possibly — nobody would be less able to assess the possibility than Sweeney — the only connection this fact had with "the project" was that it *was* long-term.

Sweeney, in any event, knew better than to ask questions. The storm that was going on inside him took precedence, anyhow; as far as he was concerned, it was even more important than the storms that were sweeping Ganymede, or any that might sweep that world in the foreseeable future. He was not used to thinking in terms of a society, even a small one; Rullman's appeals to that ideal were simply incomprehensible to him. He was the solar system's most thorough-going individualist — not by nature, but by design.

Perhaps Rullman sensed it. Whether he did or not, the assignment he gave Sweeney might have been perfectly calculated to throw a lonely man into the ultimate isolation he feared; to put the burden of an agonizing decision entirely upon the shoulders of the man who had to carry it; or — to isolate a Port spy where he could do the least harm while the colony's attention was fully occupied elsewhere. Or possibly, even probably, he had none of these motives in mind; what counted, in any event, was what he did.

He assigned Sweeney to the South polar weather station, for the duration of the emergency.

There was almost nothing to do there but watch the crystals of methane "snow" bank against the windows, and keep the station tight. The instruments reported back to base by themselves, and needed no further attention. At the height of the crisis, perhaps, Sweeney might find himself busy for a while; or he might not.

In the meantime, he had plenty of time to ask questions — and nobody to ask them of but himself, and the hooting, constantly rising wind.

There was an interlude. Sweeney hiked, on foot, back to Howe's H to recover the radio transceiver he had buried there, and then hiked back to the weather station. It took him eleven days, and efforts and privations of which Jack London might have made a whole novel. To Sweeney it meant nothing; he did not know whether or not he would want to use the radio after he got back with it; and as for the saga of his solo journey, he did not know that it was a saga, or even that it had been unusually difficult and painful. He had nothing against which to compare it, not even fiction; he had never read any. He measured things by the changes they made in his situation, and possession of the radio had not changed the questions he was asking himself; it had only made it possible to act upon the answers, once he had any answers.

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Coming back to the station, he saw a pinnah-bird. It burrowed into the nearest drift as soon as it saw him, but for the preceding instant he had had company. He never saw it again, but now and then he thought about it.

The question, put simply, was: What was he going to do now?

That he was thoroughly in love with Mike Leverault could no longer be argued. It was doubly difficult to come to grips with the emotion, however, because he did not know the name of it, and so had to reason each time with the raw experience itself, rather than with the more convenient symbol. Each time he thought about it, it shook him all over again. But there it was.

As for the colonists, he was certain that they were not criminals in any way, except by Earth's arbitrary fiat. They were a hard-working, courageous, decent lot, and had offered to Sweeney the first disinterested friendliness he had ever known.

And, like all the colonists, Sweeney could not help but admire Rullman.

There, in those three propositions, rested the case against using the radio.

The time for reporting to Meiklejon was almost up. The inert transceiver on the table before Sweeney had only to send a single one of five notes, and the colony on Ganymede would be ended. The notes were coded:

WAVVY: *Have custody need pickup*
NAVVY: *Have custody need help*
VVANY: *Need custody have help*
AAVYV: *Need custody need pickup*
YYAWY: *Have custody have pickup*

What response the computer on board the ship would make, what course of action it would dictate in response to any one of those signals was unknown, but that was now almost beside the point. Any response would be inappropriate, since not one of the five signals fitted the actual situation — despite all the intellectual travail which had gone into tailoring them.

If no note were sent, Meiklejon would go away at the end of 300 days. That might mean that Rullman's "project," whatever it was, would go through — but that wouldn't save the colony. It would take Earth a minimum of two generations to breed and mature another Sweeney from the artificially maintained ovaries of mercifully long-dead Shirley Leverault, and it was hardly likely that Earth would even try. Earth probably knew more than Sweeney did about "the project" — it would be difficult to know less — and if Sweeney himself failed to stop it, the next attempt would most likely arrive as a bomb. Earth would stop wanting "those men" back, once it became evident that she couldn't get them even through so subtle a double agent as Sweeney.

Item: chain reaction. There was,

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Sweeney knew, a considerable amount of deuterium on Ganymede, some of it locked in the icy wastes of Neptune's Trident, a lesser amount scattered through the rocks in the form of lithium ^{6} deuteride. A fission bomb going off here would stand an excellent chance of starting a fusion explosion which would detonate the whole satellite. If any still-active fragment of that explosion should hit Jupiter, only a bare 665,000 miles away now, that planet would be quite large enough to sustain a Bethé or carbon cycle; it was diffuse, but it alone among the planets had the mass. The wave front of *that* unimaginable catastrophe would boil Earth's seas in their beds; it might also — the probability was about 3/8 — trigger a nova outburst from the Sun, though nobody would stay alive to be grateful very long if it didn't.

Since Sweeney knew this, he had to assume that it was common knowledge. But was it? Common knowledge and Sweeney had had precious little contact so far.

Still, it hardly mattered. If Earth bombed the colony, it would be all up with him, regardless. Even the limited companionship, the wordless love, the sense that he might yet be born, all would be gone. He would be gone. So would the whole little world.

But if he signaled Meiklejon and the computer, he would be taken alike away from Mike, away from Rullman, away from the colony, away and away. He would stay his own dead self. He might even have a new chance to learn that same endless lesson about the shapes loneliness can take; or Earth might work a miracle and turn him into a live, Jay-positive human being.

The wind rose and rose. The congruent furies of the storms inside and outside Sweeney mounted together. Their congruence made a classic example, had he been able to recognize it, of the literary device called "the pathetic fallacy" — but Sweeney had never read any fiction, and recognizing nature in the process of imitating art would have been of no use to him anyhow.

He did not even know that, when the crisis of the exterior storm began to wear away the windward edge of the weather station's foundations with a million teeth of invisible wrath, his lonely battle to save the station might have made an epic. Whole chapters, whole cantos, whole acts of what might have been conscious heroism in another man, in a human being, were thrown away while Sweeney went about his business, his mind on his lonely debate.

There was no signal he could send that would tell Meiklejon or the computer the truth. He did not have custody of the men Earth wanted, and he didn't want to have it, so it would be idiotic to ask for help to get it. He no longer believed that Earth "must have those men back," either for Earth's purposes — mysterious though they remained — or

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for his own, essentially hopeless though his own appeared to be.

But any signal would take him off Ganymede — if he wanted to be taken.

The crisis, he saw, was over. He made the station fast.

He checked the radio once more. It worked. He snapped the tuning pointer to one of its copper contacts and closed the key, sending Meiklejon VVANY. After half an hour, the set's oscillator began to peep rhythmically, indicating that Meiklejon was still in Ganymede's sky, and had heard.

Sweeney left the set on the table in the station, went back to the mountain, and told Rullman what he was and what he had done.

Rullman's fury was completely quiet, and a thousand times more frightening than the most uncontrolled rage could have been. He simply sat behind his desk and looked at Sweeney, all the kindness gone out of his face, and the warmth out of his eyes. After a few moments, Sweeney realized that the blankness of Rullman's eyes meant that he was not seeing him at all; his mind was turned inward. So was his rage.

"I am astonished;" he said, in a voice so even that it seemed to contain no surprise at all. "Most of all, I'm astonished at myself. I should have anticipated something like this. But I didn't dream that they had the knowledge, or the guile, to stake everything on a long-term program like this. I have been, in short, an idiot."

His voice took on, for a moment, a shade of color, but it was so scathing that it made Sweeney recoil. And yet no single word of condemnation of Sweeney had yet been forthcoming from Rullman; the man was, instead, strafing himself. Sweeney said tentatively:

"How could you have known? There were a lot of points where I might have given myself away, but I was doing my damnedest not to. I might have kept the secret still longer, if I'd wanted it that way."

"You?" Rullman said. The single syllable was worse than a blow. "You're as blameless as a machine, Donald. I know too much about pantropy to think otherwise. It's very easy to isolate an Adapted infant, prevent him from becoming a human being at all, if you've sufficient ill-will to want to. Your behavior was predictable, after all."

"Was it?" Sweeney said, a little grimly. "I came and told you, didn't I?"

"And what if you did? Can that change matters now? I'm sure that Earth included that very high probability in its plans. Insofar as you have loyalties at all, they were bound to become divided; but it was probably calculated that they would stay divided — that is, would not change completely. And so here you are, trying to play both ends against the middle — you yourself being the

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middle — by betraying your masquerade to me at the same time you betray the colony to Earth. Nothing can be accomplished by that."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure," Rullman said stonily. "I suppose they offered you an inducement. Judging by the questions you've asked me before, they must have promised to make an Earth-normal human being out of you — as soon as they found out from us how to do that. But the fact of the matter is that it can't be done at all, and you know it. And now there's no future for you with us, either. I'm sorry for you, Donald, believe me; it's not your fault that they made you into a creature instead of a person. But you are nothing now but a bomb that's already gone off."

Sweeney had never known his father, and the hegemony of the Port cops had been too diffuse to instill in him any focused, automatic respect for persons standing *in loco parentis*. He discovered, suddenly, that he was furious with Rullman.

"That's a silly damn speech," he said, staring down and across the desk at the seated, slightly bowed man. "Nothing's gone off yet. There's plenty of information I can give you that you might use, if you want to work to get it. Of course if you've given up in advance —"

Rullman looked up. "What do you know?" he said, with some puzzlement. "You said yourself that it would be the computer on board this Captain Meiklejon's ship that would decide the course of action. And you can't communicate effectively with Meiklejon. This is a strange time to be bluffing, Donald."

"Why would I bluff? I know more about what Earth is *likely* to do with my message than anybody else in the colony. My experience with Earth is more recent. I wouldn't have come to you at all if I'd thought the situation to be helpless — and if I hadn't carefully picked the one message to send to Meiklejon that I thought left the colony some hope. I'm not straddling. I'm on your side. To send no message at all would have been the worst possible thing to do. This way, we may have a grace period."

"And just how," Rullman said slowly, "can you expect me to trust you?"

"That's your problem," Sweeney said brusquely. "If I really am still straddling, it's because the colony's failed to convince me that my future lies here. And if that's the case, I'm not alone — and it's the colony's own fault for being so secretive with its own people."

"Secretive?" Rullman said, with open astonishment now. "About what?"

"About the 'project.' About the original crime Earth wants you for. About why Earth wants you back — you in particular, Dr. Rullman."

"But — that's common knowledge, Donald. All of it."

"Maybe so. But it isn't common

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to *me* — and most of the original settlers take it all so much for granted that they can't talk about it, except in little cryptic references, like a private joke everybody's supposed to know. But everybody doesn't; did you know that? I've found that about half your second generation here has only the foggiest notion of the past. The amount of information available to a newcomer — whether he's newly arrived like me, or just plain newborn — you could stick in a pinnah-bird's eye. And that's dangerous. It's why I could have betrayed the colony *completely* if I hadn't decided against it, and you couldn't have stopped me."

Rullman leaned back and was quiet for quite a long time.

"Children often don't ask questions when they think they're already expected to know the answers," he murmured. He looked considerably more thunderstruck than he had when Sweeney made his original announcement. "They like to appear knowing even when they aren't; it gives them status in their own eyes."

"Children and spies," Sweeney said. "There are certain questions neither of them can ask, and for almost the same reasons. And the phonier the children's knowledge actually is, the easier for the spy to get around among the adults."

"I begin to see," Rullman said. "We thought we were immune to spying, because an Earth spy couldn't live here without elaborate, detectable protections. But that was a problem in physics, and that kind of problem is soluble. We should have assumed so from the beginning. Instead, we made ourselves socially as vulnerable as possible."

"That's how I see it. I'll bet that my father wouldn't have let you get away with it, if he'd been able to get away with you. He was supposed to have been an expert in that kind of thing. I don't know; I never knew him. And I suppose it's beside the point, anyhow."

"No," Rullman said. "It's very much to the point, and I think you've just proved it, Donald. Your father couldn't prevent it, but perhaps he's given us an instrument for repairing it."

"Meaning me?"

"Yes. Ringer or no ringer, the blood you carry — and the genes — has been with us from the beginning, and I know how it shows its effects. I see them now. Sit down, Donald. I begin to hope. What shall we do?"

"First of all," Sweeney said, "please, please tell me what this colony is all about!"

It was a difficult assignment.

Item: the Authorities. Long before space travel, big cities in the United States had fallen so far behind any possibility of controlling their own traffic problems as to make purely political solutions chimerical. No city administration could spend the amount of money needed for a radi-

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cal cure, without being ousted in the next elections by the enraged drivers and pedestrians who most needed the help.

Increasingly, the traffic problems were turned over, with gratitude and many privileges, to semi-public Port, Bridge and Highway Authorities: huge capital-investment ventures modeled upon the Port of New York Authority, which had shown its ability to build and/or run such vast operations as the Holland and Lincoln Tunnels, the George Washington Bridge, Teterboro, LaGuardia, Idlewild and Newark Airports, and many lesser facilities. By 1960 it was possible to travel from the tip of Florida to the border of Maine entirely over Authority-owned territory, if one could pay the appropriate tolls.

Item: the tolls. The Authorities were creations of the states, usually acting in pairs, and as such enjoyed legal protections not available to other private firms engaged in interstate commerce. Among these protections, in the typical enabling act, was a provision that "the two said states will not . . . diminish or impair the power of the Authority to establish, levy and collect tolls and other charges. . . ." The federal government helped; though the Federal Bridge Act of 1946 required that the collection of tolls must cease with the payment of amortization, Congress almost never invoked the Act against any Authority. Consequently, the tolls never dropped; by 1953 the Port of New York Authority was reporting a profit of over twenty million dollars a year, and annual collections were increasing at the rate of ten per cent a year.

Some of the take went into the development of new facilities — most of them so placed as to increase the take, rather than solve the traffic problem. Again the Port of New York Authority led the way; it built, against all sense, a third tube for the Lincoln Tunnel, thus pouring eight and a half million more cars per year into Manhattan's midtown area, where the city was already strangling for want of any adequate ducts to take away the then-current traffic.

Item: the Port cops. The Authorities had been authorized from the beginning to police their own premises. As the Authorities got bigger, so did the private police forces.

By the time space-travel arrived, the Authorities owned it. They had taken pains to see that it fell to them; they had learned from their airport operations — which, almost alone among their projects, usually showed a loss — that nothing less than total control is good enough. And characteristically, they never took any interest in any form of space-travel which did not involve enormous expenditures; otherwise they could take no profits from subcontracting, no profits from fast amortization of loans, no profits from the laws allowing them fast tax write-offs for new construction,

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no profits from the indefinitely protracted collection of tolls and fees after the initial cost and the upkeep had been recovered.

At the world's first commercial spaceport, Port Earth, it cost ship owners $5000 each and every time their ships touched the ground. Landing fees had been outlawed in private atmosphere flying for years, but the Greater Earth Port Authority operated under its own set of precedents; it made landing fees for spacecraft routine. And it maintained the first Port police force which was bigger than the armed forces of the nation which had given it its franchise; after a while, the distinction was wiped out, and the Port cops *were* the armed forces of the United States. It was not difficult to do, since the Greater Earth Port Authority was actually a holding company embracing every other Authority in the country, including Port Earth.

And when people, soon after spaceflight, began to ask each other, "How shall we colonize the planets?", the Greater Earth Port Authority had its answer ready.

Item: terraforming.

Terraforming — remaking the planets into near-images of the Earth, so that Earth-normal people could live on them. Port Earth was prepared to start small. Port Earth wanted to move Mars out of its orbit to a point somewhat closer to the sun, and make the minor adjustments needed in the orbits of the other planets; to transport to Mars about enough water to empty the Indian Ocean — only a pittance to Earth, after all, and not 10% of what would be needed later to terraform Venus; to carry to the little planet topsoil about equal in area to the state of Iowa, in order to get started at growing plants which would slowly change the atmosphere of Mars; and so on. The whole thing, Port Earth pointed out reasonably, was perfectly feasible from the point of view of the available supplies and energy resources, and it would cost less than thirty-three billion dollars. The Greater Earth Port Authority was prepared to recover that sum at no cost in taxes in less than a century, through such items as $50 rocket-mail stamps, $10,000 Mars landing fees, $1000 one-way strap-down tickets, $100-per-desert-acre land titles, and so on. Of course the fees would continue after the cost was recovered — for maintenance.

And what, after all, the Authority asked reasonably, was the alternative? Nothing but domes. The Greater Earth Port Authority hated domes. They cost too little to begin with, and the volume of traffic to and from them would always be minuscule. Experience on the Moon had made that painfully clear. And the public hated domes, too; it had already shown a mass reluctance to live under them.

As for the governments, other than that of the United States, which the Authority still tolerated,

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none of them had any love for domes, or for the kind of limited colonization that the domes stood for. They needed to get rid of their pullulating masses by the bucketful, not by the eye-dropperful. If the Authority knew that emigration increases the home population rather than cuts it, the Authority carefully refrained from saying so to the governments involved; they could rediscover Franklin's Law for themselves. Domes were out; terraforming was in.

Then came pantropy.

If this third alternative to the problem of colonizing the planets had come as a surprise to the Authority, and to Port Earth, they had nobody to blame for it but themselves. There had been plenty of harbingers. The notion of modifying the human stock genetically to live on the planets as they were found, rather than changing the planets to accommodate the people, had been old with Olaf Stapledon; it had been touched upon by many later writers; it went back, in essence, as far as Proteus, and as deep into the human mind as the werewolf, the vampire, the fairy changeling, the transmigrated soul.

But suddenly it was possible; and, not very long afterwards, it was a fact.

The Authority hated it. Pantropy involved a high initial investment to produce the first colonists, but it was a method which with refinement would become cheaper and cheaper. Once the colonists were planted, it required no investment at all; the colonists were comfortable on their adopted world, and could produce new colonists without outside help. Pantropy, furthermore, was at its *most* expensive less than half as costly as the setting-up of the smallest and least difficult dome. Compared to the cost of terraforming even so favorable a planet as Mars, it cost nothing at all, from the Authority's point of view.

And there was no way to collect tolls against even the initial expense. It was too cheap to bother with.

WILL YOUR CHILD BE A MONSTER?

If a number of influential scientists have their way, some child or grandchild of yours may eke out his life in the frozen wastes of Pluto, where even the Sun is only a spark in the sky — and will be unable to return to Earth until after he dies, *if then!*

Yes, even now there are plans afoot to change innocent unborn children into alien creatures who would die terribly the moment that they set foot upon the green planet of their ancestors. Impatient with the slow but steady pace of man's conquest of Mars, prominent ivory-tower thinkers are working out ways to produce all kinds of travesties upon the human form — travesties which will be able to survive,

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somehow, in the bitterest and most untamed of planetary infernos.

The process which may produce these pitiful freaks — at enormous expense — is called "pantropy." It is already in imperfect and dangerous existence. Chief among its prophets is white-haired, dreamy-eyed Dr. Archibald Rullman, who . . .

"*Stop*," Sweeney said.

He put his fingertips to his temples, and then, trembling, took them away again and looked at Rullman. The scientist put down the old magazine clipping, which even in its telfon sheath was as yellow as *paella* after its half-life in Ganymede's air. Rullman's own hands were quite steady.

"Those lies! — I'm sorry. But they work, I know they work. That's what they filled me up with. It's different when you realize how vicious they are."

"I know," Rullman said, gently. "It's easy to do. Bringing up an Adapted child is a special process, the child is always isolated and anxious to imitate, you may tell it anything you wish; it has no choice but to believe, it's desperate for closer contact, for acceptance, for the embraces it can never have. It's the ultimate in bottle-babies: the breast that might have fed it may be just on the other side of the glass, but it also lies generations and generations in the past. Even the voice of the child's mother comes along a wire — if it comes along at all. I know, Donald, believe me. It happened to me, too. And it's very hard."

"Archibald Rullman was —"

"My remote, immediate father. My mother died early; they often do, of the deprivation, I believe; like yours. But my father taught me the truth, there in the Moon caves, before he was killed."

Sweeney took a deep breath. "I'm learning all that now. Go on."

"Are you sure, Donald? Are you sure you want to know?"

"Go on. I need to know; it's not too late. Please."

"Well," Rullman said reflectively, "the Authority got laws passed against pantropy, but for a while the laws didn't have many teeth; Congress was leary of forbidding vivisection at the same time, and didn't know exactly what it *was* being asked to forbid; Port didn't want to be too explicit. My father was determined to see pantropy tried while the laws still provided some loopholes — he knew well enough that they'd be stiffened as soon as Port thought it safe to stiffen them. And he was convinced that we'd never colonize the stars by dome-building or terraforming. Those might work on some of our local planets — Mars, Venus — but they would never work outside."

"Outside? How would anybody get there?"

"With the interstellar drive, Don-

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ald. It's been in existence for decades, in fact for nearly half a century. It was even in use briefly — a fact that has been thoroughly suppressed. Naturally Port's been sitting on it; but all the Port ships have it, just in case. Even our ship has it; so does your ferry-pilot friend up there."

Sweeney shut up.

"The thing is this: most planets, even right here inside the solar system, won't sustain domes to begin with, and can't be terraformed in any even imaginable way. Jupiter, for instance. And too many others will yield to either procedure too slowly, and too unprofitably, to tempt Port; and over interstellar distances, Port won't even try, since there'd be no trade or traffic it could collect against.

"Pantropy was the obvious answer — not for Port, certainly, but for man's future in general. Somehow, my father sold that idea to some politicians, and to some people with money, too. They all wanted to make at least one demonstration experiment. We are that experiment: this colony on Ganymede.

"Port had it outlawed before it was fairly started, but by the time they found the Moon labs it was too late; we'd gotten away. It was then that they put teeth into the laws, and made them retroactive; they had to kill pantropy, and they knew it.

"And that is why our very existence is a crime, Donald. And it is an absolute requirement of Port's policy that the colony be a failure, and that they *be able to prove it*. That's why they want us back. They want to be able to exhibit us, to show what helpless freaks we are on Earth, and to tell their people that we couldn't get along on Ganymede either, and had to be bailed out of our own mess.

"After that — well, there are those phony commerce-raiding charges you told me about. We'll be tried. We'll be executed, most likely, by exposing us in public to Earth-normal conditions. It would be a fine object lesson: indeed, the finishing touch."

Sweeney crouched down in his chair, utterly revolted by the first complete emotion he had ever experienced: loathing for himself. He understood, now, the overtones in Rullman's voice. Everyone had been betrayed — everyone!

The voice went on without mercy, piling up the ashes. "Now, as for the project, our project that is, that's equally simple. We know that in the long run human beings can't colonize the stars without pantropy. We know that Port won't allow pantropy to be used. And we know, therefore, that we ourselves have to carry pantropy to the stars, before Port can head us off. One, two, three, infinity.

"So that's what we're going to do, or *were* going to do. We've got our old ship fitted out for the trip, and we've got a new generation of chil-

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dren — just a small number — trained to operate it, and adapted for — well, for someplace. The kids can't live on Earth, and they can't live on Ganymede; but they can live on —

"I told you the interstellar drive was briefly in use. Those first explorers found nothing suitable for immediate colonization; but they did chart — and your father, Donald, was one of those who uncovered these suppressed records for us — three planets, each of which is approximately identical with — But I'm not trusting even you with that information. Let me simply say that the explorers' data were sufficient to give us a working basis for pantropy.

"These planets belong to three different suns, each one of which is at a different compass-point, and at a different distance from Sol. The kids have no orders. They are equipped to live on any one of the three. Which one they'll actually go to will be decided only after they're aloft and on their way. Nobody who stays behind will be able to betray them. Earth will never find them.

"There will be the beginning of the most immense 'seeding program' in man's history: seeding the stars with people.

"*If* we can still manage to get it off the ground."

In the silence that followed, the door of Rullman's office opened quietly, and Mike Leverault came in, looking preoccupied and carrying a clipboard. She stopped when she saw them, and Sweeney's heart constricted on the thawing slush inside its stiffly pumping chambers.

"Excuse me," she said. "I thought . . . Is there something wrong? You both look so grim —"

"There's something wrong," Rullman said. He looked at Sweeney.

A corner of Sweeney's mouth twitched, without his willing it. He wondered if he were trying to smile, and if so, about what.

"There's no help for it," he said. "Dr. Rullman, your colonists will have to revolt against you."

IV

The starshell burst high, perhaps three miles up. Though it was over the western edge of the plateau, enough light spilled down to the floor of the Gouge to checker the rocking, growling halftrack.

The sound, however, was too faint to break through the noise of the turbine, and Sweeney wasn't worried about the brief light. The truck, pushing its way north at a good twenty miles an hour beneath the wild growth, would be as difficult to detect from the air as a mouse running among roots.

Besides, nobody would be likely to be looking into the Gouge now. The evidences of battle sweeping the highlands were too compelling; Sweeney himself was following them tensely.

Mike was doing the driving, leaving Sweeney free to crouch in the

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tool- and instrument-littered tonneau by the big aluminum keg, watching the radar screen. The paraboloid basketwork of the radar antenna atop the truck was not sweeping; it was pointing straight back along the way he and Mike had come, picking up a microwave relay from the last automatic station that they had passed. The sweeping was being done for Sweeney, by the big radio-telescope atop Howe's π.

Sweeney paid little attention to the near, low, fast streaks on the screen. They were painted there by rocket ordnance of low caliber — a part of the fighting which had no bearing on the over-all pattern. That pattern was already clear: it showed, as it had for days, that the insurgent forces still held the mountain and its heavy weapons, but that the attacking salient from the loyalists' camp up north was maintaining the initiative, and was gathering strength.

It had developed into a running stalemate. Though the insurgents had obviously managed to drive the loyalists out of Howe's π, perhaps by some trick with the ventilators, perhaps by some form of guerilla warfare, they were equally evidently no match for the loyalists in the field. There they were losing ground twice as fast as they had originally taken it. The supporting fire from the mountain didn't seem to be helping them much; it was heavy, but it was terribly inaccurate. The frequent starshells told their own story of bad visibility and worse intelligence. And the loyalists, ousted though they were, had all the planes; they had the effrontery to fly them over the lines with riding lights.

What the loyalists would do when confronted with the problem of retaking the mountain was another question. Nothing short of very heavy stuff would make much of a dent on Howe's π. And, even overlooking the fact that the heavy stuff was all inside the mountain, it would be suicide for *either* force to use it on Ganymede. The fighting hadn't become that bitter yet. But it still might.

And the Earth ships that showed on the screen inside the halftrack knew it. That much showed clearly by their disposition. They were there, almost surely, because they had deduced that Sweeney was leading the insurgents — but they showed no desire to draw in and give Sweeney a hand. Instead they stood off, a little inside the orbit of Callisto, about 900,000 miles from Ganymede — far enough to give themselves a good running start if they saw an atomic spark on Ganymede, close enough to bail Sweeney out once it seemed that he had gained the victory anyhow.

Mike's voice, shouting something unintelligible, came back to him mixed in with the roaring of the halftrack's turbines.

"What's the matter?" he shouted, cocking his head.

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". . . that rock-tumble ahead. If it's as . . . before . . . probably break the beam."

"Stop her," Sweeney shouted. "Want another reading."

The halftrack halted obediently, and Sweeney checked his screen against Rullman's readings, which showed on tumblers snicking over on a counter near his elbow. It checked; 900,000 was close enough. Maybe a little closer, but not much. The wave-front of a full satellary explosion would cross that distance in about five seconds, carrying instant obliteration with it; but five seconds would be long enough to allow the automatics on the Earth ships to slam them away on overdrive.

He slapped her on the shoulder, twice. "Okay so far. Go ahead."

Her reply was lost, but he saw her crash-helmet nod, and the truck began to cant itself slowly and crazily up a long, helter-skelter causeway of boulders and rubble: a sort of talus-slope, one of many rolled each year into the Gouge by exfoliation in the cliffs. Mike turned and smiled back at him gleefully, and he smiled back; the treads were clanking too loudly to permit any other answer.

The whole scheme had depended from the beginning upon so long a chain of *ifs* that it could still fall apart at any moment and at any flawed link. It had been dependable only at the beginning. The signal Sweeney had sent Meiklejon — VVANY — had told Meiklejon nothing, since he didn't know the code; but it had told the computer that Sweeney still lacked custody of the Adapted Men that Earth wanted, but that he had the help he thought he would need in getting that custody eventually. That much was a known. What orders the computer would rap out for Meiklejon in response comprised the first of the *ifs*.

The computer might, of course, react with some incredibly bold piece of gamesmanship too remote from normal human thinking to be even guessable; Shannon's chess-playing machines sometimes won games from masters that way, though more usually they could barely hold their own. Since there was no way to anticipate what such a gambit would be like, neither Sweeney nor Rullman had wasted any time trying to pretend that there was.

But the other alternative was much more likely. The machine would assume that Sweeney was safe, as was evidenced by the arrival of the coded signal; and that if he had help, he could only have gathered about him a secret core of disaffected colonists, a "Loyal Ganymedian Underground" or equivalent. Earth would assume, and would build the assumption into the computer, that many of the colonists were dissatisfied with their lives; it was a hope that Earth could turn into a fact without being aware of the delusion, since nobody on Earth could suspect how beautiful Gany-

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mede was. And the computer would assume, too, that it might be only a matter of time before Sweeney also had custody, and would be sending Meiklejon WAVVY — or maybe even YYAWY.

"How will we know if it does?" Rullman had demanded.

"If it does, then the deadline will pass without Meiklejon's making a move. He'll just stick to his orbit until the computer changes his mind. What else could it tell him to do, anyhow? He's just one man in a small ship without heavy armament. And he's an Earthman at that — he couldn't come down here and join my supposed underground group even if the idea occurred to him. He'll sit tight."

The halftrack heaved itself over an almost cubical boulder, slid sidewise along its tilted face, and dropped heavily to the wash of rounded smaller stones. Sweeney looked up from the radar controls to see how the big aluminum keg was taking the ride. It was awash in a sea of hand tools — picks, adzes, sledges, spikes, coils of line rapidly unwinding — but it was securely strapped down. The miracle of fireworks chemistry (and specifically, Ganymedian chemistry) still slumbered inside it. He clambered forward into the cab beside Mike and strapped himself down to enjoy the ride.

There was no way to predict or to calculate how long an extension of the deadline the machine on Meiklejon's ship would allow Sweeney for the launching of his insurrection. The colony worked as though there would be no grace period at all. When the deadline passed without any sign that Meiklejon even existed — though the radio-telescope showed that he was still there — Sweeney and Rullman did not congratulate each other. They could not be sure that the silence and the delay meant what they had very good reason to hope that it meant. They could only go on working.

The movements of machines, men, and energy displays which should look to Meiklejon like a revolt of the colonists burst away from Howe's π eleven days later. All the signs showed that it had been the loyalists who had been driven out of the mountain. They also showed that it was the loyalists who had set up their base near the north pole of Ganymede. Sweeney and Mike had driven through the Gouge before, for that purpose, planting in a radar-crazy jungle a whole series of small devices, all automatic, all designed to register on Meiklejon's detectors as a vast bustle of heavy machinery. The visible strategic movements of the opposing armies had suggested the same loyalist concentration at the pole.

And now Sweeney and Mike were on their way back.

The computer appeared to be waiting it out; Meiklejon had evidently fed the data to it as a real rebellion. Sweeney's side obviously

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was carrying the field at first. The computer had no reason to run a new extrapolation up to the first day the loyalist forces managed to hold their lines; and then it had to run squarely up against the question of how the loyalists could take the mountain even if, in the succeeding weeks, they should sweep the field clear of Sweeney.

"Kid stuff," Sweeney had said. "It hasn't any reason to think differently. Too simple to make it extrapolate beyond the second derivative."

"You're very confident, Donald."

Sweeney stirred uneasily in the bucket seat as he recalled Rullman's smile. No Adapted Man, least of all Sweeney, had had any real childhood; no "kid stuff." Fortunately the Port cops had thought it essential that he know the theory of games.

The halftrack settled down to relatively smooth progress once more, and Sweeney got up to check the screen. The talus-slope, as Mike had anticipated, cut off reception from the radar relay station behind them; Sweeney started the antenna sweeping. Much of the field was cut off by the near edge of the Gouge, but that effect would begin to disappear gradually from the screen now. The floor of the Gouge rose steadily as one approached the north pole, although it never quite reached the level of the plains. He could already capture enough sky to be satisfied that the Earth ships were just where they had been before.

That had been the last risk: that Meiklejon, alarmed at the computer's continued counsels of inaction, would radio Earth for advice from higher authorities. Obviously a colonists' revolt on Ganymede, one that could be painted as a "We want to go home" movement, would be ideal for Earth's purposes. Earth would not only insist on Meiklejon's sitting tight as his computer had told him to do — but would also hasten to bring up reinforcements for Sweeney, just in case.

Both Sweeney and Rullman had known how likely that was to happen, and had decided to take the chance, and make preparations against it. The chance had not paid off — the Earth ships were here — but it still looked as though the preparations might.

As content as was possible under the circumstances, Sweeney went forward. Before reaching for his safety belt, he stopped to kiss Mike, to the considerable detriment of her control of the lurching truck.

The explosion threw him, hard, halfway across the empty seat.

He struggled up, his head ringing. The truck's engines seemed to have stopped; beneath the ringing, he could hear nothing but the sound of the blowers.

"Don! Are you all right? What was that?"

"Ugh," he said, sitting down. "Nothing broken. Hit my head a crack. It was high explosive, from the sound. A big one."

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Her face was pinched and anxious in the soft glow from the dashboard. "One of ours? Or —"

"I don't know, Mike. Sounded like it hit back down the ravine a distance. What's the matter with the engine?"

She touched the starter; it whined, and the engine caught at once. "I must have stalled it," she said apologetically. She put it in gear. "But it doesn't feel right. The traction's bad on your side."

Sweeney swung the cab door open and dropped to the stony ground. Then he whistled.

"What is it?"

"That was closer than I thought," he called back. "The right-hand track is cut almost in half. A flying rock splinter, I suppose. Toss me the torch."

She leaned far out across his seat, reaching the arc-cutter to him, and then the goggles. He made his way to the rear of the truck and snapped the switch. The electric arc burned sulfur-blue; a moment later, the damaged track was unwinding from around the four big snowmobile tires like an expiring snake. Dragging the cord behind him, Sweeney cut the left track off, too, and then returned to the cab, rewinding the cord as he went.

"Okay, but take it slow. Those tires are going to be cut to ribbons by the time we hit that base."

Her face was still white, but she asked no more questions. The halftrack began to crawl forward, a halftrack no longer. At a little over two miles farther on, the first of the eight tires blew, making them both jump. A hasty check showed that it was the right outside rear one. Another two and a half miles, and the right inside drive tire blew out, too; it was bad to have two gone on the same side of the truck, but at least they were on different axles and in alternate positions. The next one to go, five miles farther on — the ground became less littered as it rose — was the left inside rear.

"Don."

"Yes, Mike."

"Do you think that was an Earth bomb?"

"I don't know, Mike. I doubt it; they're too far away to be throwing stuff at Ganymede except at random, and why would they do that? More likely it was one of our torpedoes, out of control." He snapped his fingers. "Wait a minute. If we're throwing H. E. at each other now, the cops will have noticed, and *that* we can check."

Bang!

The halftrack settled down to the right and began to slobber at the ground. No check was needed to tell Sweeney that that one had been the right outside driver. Those two wheels would be hitting on bare rims within the next thousand feet or so of travel; the main weight of the vehicle was back there — the steering tires took very little punishment, comparatively.

Gritting his teeth, he unbuckled

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the safety and scrambled back to the radar set, checking the aluminum drum automatically as he went.

There was much more sky showing on the screen now. It was impossible to triangulate the positions of the Earth ships now that the transmission from Howe's π was cut off, but the pips on the screen were markedly dimmer. Sweeney guessed that they had retreated at least another hundred thousand miles. He grinned and leaned into Mike's ear.

"It was one of ours," he said. "Rullman's stepping up on the heavy artillery, that's all. One of his torpedo pilots must have lost one in the Gouge. The Port cops have detected the step-up, all right — they've backed off. It's beginning to look more and more as though the rebels might try to smear the loyalist base with a fission bomb, and they don't want to be cheek to cheek with the planet when that happens. How far do we have to go, still?"

Mike said, "We're —"

Bang! Mike grabbed for the switch, and the engine died.

"— here," she finished, and then, amazingly, began to giggle.

Sweeney swallowed, and then discovered that he was grinning, too. "With three track-tires intact," he said. "Hooray for us. Let's get on the job."

Another starshell broke open in the sky, not as near as before. Sweeney went around to the back of the truck, Mike picking her way after him, both of them looking ruefully at the wreaths of shredded silicone rubber which had once been two excellent tires. Two of the rims were quite bare; the fifth deflated tire, which had not been driven on, was only a puncture and might be salvaged.

"Unstrap the barrel and roll 'er out the tailgate," Sweeney said. "Easy. Now let's lower 'er to the ground, and over there."

All around them, concealed among the rocks and the massive, gnarled trunks, were the little instruments whose busy electronic chattering made this spot sound like a major military encampment to the ships laying off Ganymede. Photographs, of course, would not be expected to show it: the visible light was insufficient, the infra-red still weaker, and ultra-violet plates would be stopped by the atmosphere. Nobody would expect to *see* anything from space by any method, not in the Gouge; but the instruments would report power being expended, and power sources moving about — and rebel torpedoes homing purposefully on the area. That would be enough.

With Mike's help, Sweeney stood the aluminum barrel on end roughly in the center of this assemblage. "I'm going to take that punctured tire off," he said. "We've got fifteen minutes until takeoff time, and we may need it later. Know how to wire up this thing?"

"I'm not an idiot. Go change your tire."

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While Sweeney worked, Mike located the main input lead for the little invisible chatterers and spliced a line into it; to this she rigged a spring-driven switch which would snap to "Off" as soon as current was delivered to a solenoid which actuated its trigger. One strand of reel-wound cable went to the solenoid, another to a red-splashed terminal on the side of the aluminum keg. She checked the thumb-plunger at the other end of the cable. Everything was ready; when that plunger was pushed, the little chatterers would go off, at the same moment that the barrel went on.

"All set, Mike?"

"Ready and waiting. Five minutes until takeoff time."

"Good," Sweeney said, taking the reel from her. "You'd better get in the truck and take it on across the pole — over the horizon from here."

"Why? There's no real danger. And if there is, what good would I be over there alone?"

"Look, Mike," Sweeney said. He was already walking backwards, still to the north, paying out cable. "I just want to get that truck out of here; maybe we can use it, and once that barrel starts, it just might set the truck on fire. Besides, supposing the cops decide to take a close look down here? The truck's visible, where I wouldn't be; it'd be far better to have it farther on over the horizon from them. Fair enough?"

"Oh, all right. Just don't get yourself killed, that's all."

"I won't. I'll be along after the show's over. Go on, beat it."

Scowling, though not very convincingly, she climbed back into the truck, which pulled slowly away up the grade. Sweeney could hear its bare rims screaming against upthrusts of rock long after it had disappeared, but finally it was out of earshot as well.

He continued to walk backward, unwinding the cable from the reel until it was all gone, and the phony encampment was a full mile south of him. He took the thumb switch in his right hand, checked his watch, and crouched down behind a long low spur to wait.

A whole series of starshells made a train of blue suns across the sky. Somewhere a missile screamed, and then the ground shook heavily. Sweeney fervently hoped that the "insurgent" torpedomen weren't shaving it too fine.

But it wouldn't be long now. In just a few seconds, the survival ship — the ship aimed at one of three unknown stars, and carrying the new generation of Adapted Men — would take off from Howe's π.

Twenty seconds.

Fifteen.

Ten.

Nine.

Eight.

Seven.

Six.

Sweeney pushed the plunger.

The aluminum keg ignited with a hollow cough, and an intense ball of

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light, far too bright to be shut out either by the welding goggles or by closed eyelids, rose into Ganymede's sky. The heat struck against Sweeney's skin as strongly as the backwash of the JATO unit had done, so long ago. The concussion, which followed about nine seconds later, flattened him and made his nose bleed.

Uncaring, he rolled over and looked upward. The light had already almost died. There was now a roiling column of white smoke, shot through with lurid, incandescent colors, hurling itself skyward at close to a mile a minute.

It was altogether a hell of a convincing-looking fission bomb — for a fake.

The column didn't begin to mushroom until it was almost five miles up, but by that time Sweeney was sure that there wasn't an Earth ship anywhere within ten astronomical units of Ganymede. Nobody would stop to make inquiries, especially when all the instruments in the "encampment" had stopped transmitting simultaneously with the "blast."

It might, of course, occur to Port later that the "blast" might have been a huge, single-shot Roman candle fired from an aluminum keg, propelled by a mixture of smoke-flare compounds and low-grade chemical explosives. But by that time, the survival ship would be gone beyond all possibility of tracing its path.

As a matter of fact, it was gone already; it had left on the count, uncounted by Sweeney, of Zero.

Sweeney got up, humming cheerfully — and quite as tunelessly as Rullman — and continued to plod north. On the other side of the pole, the Gouge was supposed to continue to become shallower as it proceeded down the Jupiter-ward hemisphere of Ganymede. There was a twilight zone there, illuminated by the sun irregularly because of libration while Ganymede was on the sunward side of Jupiter, and quite regularly as the satellite went toward and away from occultation with the big primary. Of course the occultation periods would be rather cold, but they lasted less than eight hours apiece.

Elsewhere on Ganymede, the other colonists were heading for similar spots, their spurious war equipment destroyed, their purpose fulfilled. They were equipped variously, but all as well as Sweeney; and he had a sound ten-wheeled snowmobile, on which the six remaining tires could be redistributed to make the vehicle suitable for heavy tractoring, and with a tonneau loaded with tools, seeds, slips and cuttings, medical supplies, reserve food and fuel. He also had a wife.

Earth would visit Ganymede, of course. But it would find nothing. The inside of Howe's π had been razed when the survival ship had taken off. As for the people, they would be harmless, ignorant, and *widely* scattered.

Peasants, Sweeney thought.

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Whistling, he crossed the north pole. Nothing but peasants.

At last he saw the squat shape of the truck, crouched at the mouth of a valley. At first Mike was not visible, but finally he spotted her, standing with her back to him on a rise. He clambered up beside her.

The valley was narrow for about a hundred feet ahead, and then it opened out in a broad fan of level land. A faint haze hovered over it. To an Earthman, nothing could have looked more desolate; but no Earthman was looking at it.

"I'll bet that's the best farm land on Ganymede," Sweeney whispered. "I wish —"

Mike turned and looked at him. He cut the wish off, unspoken, but there was no doubt that Mike had fathomed it. But Rullman was no longer on Ganymede to share its beauties — this one, or any other. Though he would never see the end of the journey, and could not have survived at its goal, he had gone with the children on the ship — and taken his extortable knowledge with him.

He had been, Sweeney knew, a great man. Greater, perhaps, than his father.

"Go on ahead with the truck, Mike," Sweeney said softly. "I'll walk on behind you."

"Why? It'll ride easy on that soil — the extra weight won't matter."

"I'm not worrying about the weight. It's just that I want to walk it. It's — well, hell, Mike, don't you know that I'm just about to be born? Whoever heard of a kid arriving with a fourteen-ton truck?"

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Screenwriter and novelist Kem Bennett, whose THE FABULOUS WINK *(Pellegrini, 1951) remains one of my all-time favorite light fantasies, has appeared here before with a gentle ghost story* (The Soothsayer, *F&SF, August, 1952). Now, by way of contrast, he turns to extravagant science fiction, and considers the problems of smuggling in the interstellar future. As a Cornishman, Mr. Bennett has a hereditary interest in this fine art of mocking authority; but his brandy-running ancestors never encountered an inspector of the caliber of Mr. Pedigree . . . nor did they enjoy certain advantages possessed by the carapaced contrabandists of Albenil.*

Rufus

by KEM BENNETT

SENIOR CUSTOMS OFFICER ALBERT Pedigree watched Cosmic Spaceline's flagship *Velocity* settle down on the Saharan moss like a monstrous egg-timer with spider's legs. There were thirty-two humans aboard her. They went one way. An assortment of Martian Ants, Valurians, Trots, Anks, Herolites and Blimmies went another. Then came the passengers from Albenil who were Albert Pedigree's especial responsibility and he stirred himself. There were only three. Without looking at the passenger list he knew their names — Mr. and Mrs. Ttlutllankl. And child; since her last time on Earth Mrs. Ttlutllankl had presented her husband with an heir.

Mr. Pedigree pulled a face. He took a small white pill from a bottle in his desk and drank it down with a glass of nectar from the government dispenser by the door. He breathed deeply and squared his narrow shoulders. The pill, approved for the use of Customs Officers when dealing with difficult clients, would heighten his perception at the same time as it soothed his nerves and enabled him to approach his duties with a detached and tranquil mind.

In came the Albenili, through the air-lock whose doors swung open automatically, into the Reception Dome, down the passage to the door marked ALBENILI and into Mr. Pedigree's stiffly smiling presence. Mrs. Ttlutllankl led. Mr. Ttlullankl brought up behind, guiding the trolley on which Ttlutllankl Junior lay, as helpless as a human baby.

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Fluff-fluff-fluff went Mrs. Ttlutllankl's six large hairy feet through the thick pile of the government self-growing carpet. She stopped. Albert Pedigree looked up — and up — into Mrs. Ttlutllankl's peculiar face, ten feet above his head. "Good morning, Mrs. Ttlutllankl," he said in Albenil as good as a human tongue could hope to enunciate. "I hope you had a pleasant voyage."

"Space travel bores me to sobs," Mrs. Ttlutllankl answered. "But we're here and that's a lot to be thankful for. How have you been keeping, Pedigree?"

Mr. Pedigree could feel his pill working. Without effort he controlled the irritation produced by Mrs. Ttlutllankl's odious sophistication and familiarity. "Very well, thank you, Mrs. Ttlutllankl," he said sweetly. Then he smiled a smile of terrible hypocrisy. "Please accept my hearty congratulations." He went over to the trolley and patted Ttlutllankl Junior's carapace. It felt like patting an asbestos-lagged boiler badly in need of a shave. No love, no sentimental gooeyness, touched Mr. Pedigree's heart as he did so. It was part of the service: *Customs Officers shall at all times be as friendly, courteous and understanding as their duties permit.* "What is his name?" he asked Mrs. Ttlutllankl.

"Rufus."

"Rufus!" Mr. Pedigree stared at Baby Rufus. Six feet long. Legs, all six of 'em, invisible because they were helplessly folded beneath the carapace. The shiny, pear-shaped head, with its embryonic antennae, its round, multi-faceted unwinking green eyes. The ferocious mandibles which even now could have seized, killed and dismembered Albert Pedigree in less than half a minute had he been foolish enough to get within range. The working tentacles sprouting like the hairs of a nightmare mustache from beneath the horrible jaws. Brrr, Mr. Pedigree said to himself and wondered why, in Star's name, he had ever volunteered for the Albenil section. Then he remembered himself. "Goo, goo," he said to Rufus. "There's a boy. There's a pretty boy." He gave the creature's carapace a last perfunctory pat and went back to his desk, steering a wide course round Baby Rufus's mandibles. "Surely Rufus is not an Albenil name," he remarked to Mrs. Ttlutllankl, pressing the button which electrically elevated his desk to the Albenil lady's eye-level.

"No, it's the name of a friend of ours in London. Rufus Polax." Mrs. Ttlutllankl's overlapping jaw-plates gaped. She was smiling. "I only hope Polax will be pleased."

Mr. Pedigree cast an eye at Rufus. That! For a godchild! Ouch. "I'm sure he'll be delighted," he said soapily. "Now, Mrs. Ttlutllankl, have you anything to declare?"

The Ttlutllankl's baggage slid out of a chute in the wall and came to rest on a bench at the Albenil lady's forefeet. Great plastic boxes, each containing a spare carapace. It was

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the custom for well-to-do Albenili to have their natural and ugly carapaces surgically removed and to wear instead artificial carapaces of many colors and patterns according to the occasion. The best carapaces were manufactured on Earth in Cincinnati, North America, and Birmingham, England, and their sale formed an important part of the commerce between Albenil and Earth.

Mrs. Ttlutllankl was waving a tentacle at the carapace-cases. "Just personal things, Pedigree — and a few rather dreary little presents for friends."

"Enumerate them, please," Mr. Pedigree said, his fingers poised above the writing machine.

"A necklace of Albenil garnets for Rufus Polax's daughter," Mrs. Ttlutllankl started. "A toy antigravity carriage for the small son of another friend. An artificial memory for Professor Blotto of London University . . ." Her clicking, metallic voice went on and Mr. Pedigree did his duty with the writing machine, recording the list of declared articles for Mrs. Ttlutllankl to sign later on. While his fingers moved with automatic dexterity, however, his mind was hard at work on another project. He was thinking of diamonds. Albenil diamonds were the size of hens' eggs and worth anything from five thousand Earth-dollars upwards. The terms of a commercial treaty between Earth and Albenil laid down that the export of Albenil diamonds should be controlled entirely by the Albenil Diamond Monopoly, and made it an offence for Earthlings and Albenili to carry diamonds either out of Albenil or into Earth. This was because a backward halfwit in his dotage could, on Albenil, go out for the day with a bucket and spade and collect diamonds enough to make himself a millionaire in Earth currency. Not unnaturally, the Albenil World Government, on to a Very Good Thing, desired at all costs to keep the diamond prices up.

Mrs. Ttlutllankl had finished enumerating her dutiable possessions. Mr. Pedigree added dates, times, passport particulars, names, identity numbers and half a dozen other pieces of seemingly futile information to the form in his writing machine. At the same moment he was asking himself where the Ttlutllankls had hidden the diamonds this time. This was their thirteenth visit to Earth. (Thirteen, thought Mr. Pedigree, an unlucky number in ancient times. Aha!) On three occasions Mr. Pedigree had been clever, or fortunate enough to catch them smuggling. That in itself was something, but since he did not for a moment imagine that the Ttlutllankls had been diamond-less on the other ten occasions, it was not much. The score so far was 9–3, a figure that Mr. Pedigree found humiliating and was determined to better.

"Sign here, please, Mrs. Ttlutllankl. . . . And here. . . . And here. . . . And here. Thank you."

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Mr. Pedigree transferred the form to an auto-duplicator-cum-teleprinter-cum-microfilm filing machine. He pressed several buttons. Mr. Pedigree operated the lift control switch and his desk sank gently down to ground level again. Mr. Pedigree eyed the carapace-cases with a beady, calculating eye. The overture was over. The performance was about to begin. Feeling Mrs. Ttlutllankl's greeny-yellow insect's eyes boring into the back of his neck but ignoring the mocking malevolence that he knew they contained because he was armored in zeal and righteousness, Mr. Pedigree seized his microwave searching projector and switched it on to the first of the carapace-cases. He watched the screen on the wall of the room for the image it would register if the microwaves passed through matter possessing the molecular structure of a diamond. No image appeared. Mr. Pedigree had known it wouldn't; the Ttlutllankls were not amateurs.

He laid aside his machine and and stared up into Mrs. Ttlutllankl's face. "Compartments, please, Mrs. Ttlutllankl." With a long-suffering gesture of the tentacles the Albenil lady folded her legs beneath her carapace and sank into a sitting position. Mr. Pedigree fetched his little ladder. It was not possible to use the projector on Mrs. Ttlutllankl because the microwaves had a powerful destructive effect on living tissue. Pity. On his hands and knees Mr. Pedigree crawled over Mrs. Ttlutllankl's stylish cobalt-blue carapace. He opened the compartments which served the lady as pockets and carefully went through the contents. Tap-tap-tap went his little hammer as he searched for hidden compartments, listening carefully for hollowness. Nothing. He climbed down carefully. It was within his power to demand that she remove her carapace. He thought of doing so; then decided not to. Intuition told him that she was clean. Besides, it would have meant seeing Mrs. Ttlutllankl in the raw, as it were, and that Mr. Pedigree had no desire to do.

"Is that all, Pedigree?" Mrs. Ttlutllankl asked calmly. "May we go now? Rufus will be wanting his four o'clock feed very soon."

Mr. Pedigree held his smile firmly in place. The threat of being obliged to watch Rufus taking nourishment made his blood run cold; after all, he could not even watch a bull-fight without feeling upset. He gently shook his head. "Not just yet, Mrs. Ttlutllankl. I have to do my duty. I shall not be long."

Mrs. Ttlutllankl's jaw-plates gaped in a hypocritical smile. She started sharpening her mandibles by clashing them together, knowing that it was a noise that Mr. Pedigree did not care for.

Mr. Pedigree shut his ears. He turned to look at Mr. Ttlutllankl, his mind seeking inspiration from past successes. Mr. Ttlutllankl had been very silent — far more silent

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than usual. Why, Mr. Pedigree asked himself, had Mr. Ttlutllankl said not a word, neither of greeting, nor protest, nor impatience? Because he was doting upon the near-helpless chunk of infant Albenil on the trolley in front of him? Hmmm. Perhaps. Because he was dematerializing? Surely not! Mr. Pedigree found himself almost unable to believe it. Admittedly the Albenil ability to dematerialize small objects seemed like the answer to a smuggler's prayer, but faced with an inspector of Mr. Pedigree's caliber it was acceptedly futile and Mr. Pedigree could hardly bring himself to think that Ttlutllankl would be anything so fooolish.

Yet, staring at Ttlutllankl with experienced eyes, Mr. Pedigree found himself becoming more and more persuaded. Such stillness. Such silence. Such a brown study of concentration.

"Mr. Ttlutllankl," Mr. Pedigree said in a honeyed voice. No response. "Mr. Ttlutllankl!" he said again, this time more firmly. No response.

Mr. Pedigree marched up to Mr. Ttlutllankl and beat an imperious tattoo on his carapace with his little hammer, at the same time shouting in a loud voice, "Mr. Ttlutllankl!"

"Yes, Mr. Pedigree?"

"Please come to the desk."

Up went Mr. Pedigree's desk on its electrical ram. Fiercely Mr. Pedigree stared into Mr. Ttlutllankl's great, sad, green eyes. "Multiply fifteen by one hundred and forty-seven," he shouted.

"Two thousand, two hundred and five," said Mr. Ttlutllankl.

"Multiply thirty-three by nineteen hundred and eight!"

Mr. Ttlutllankl's antennae quivered. He looked at his wife, at his forefeet, and back again at Mr. Pedigree. "Sixty-two thousand, nine hundred and seventy-four," he said with a great effort.

"Wrong!" said Mr. Pedigree triumphantly. "Give me the square root of fourteen thousand, seven hundred and twenty-two."

"I can't," said Mr. Ttlutllankl apathetically.

"How long," said Mr. Pedigree, "would it take for a bath with a capacity of nine hundred gallons to fill if water were running into it through a pipe delivering two and three-eighths gallons every seven minutes?"

Diamonds the size of golf-balls gleamed in the air three feet from Mr. Ttlutllankl's mandibles. They fell with a clatter on to Mr. Pedigree's desk and he caught them swiftly before they had time to roll off. Mr. Pedigree was delighted. Mr. Pedigree said, "Aha! How foolish of you, Ttlutllankl!" Mr. Pedigree moved a mental scoreboard to register 9–4 while Ttlutllankl bowed his pear-shaped head. By destroying Ttlutllankl's concentration with his sums Mr. Pedigree had prevented the Albenil gentleman from holding the diamonds in a state of dematerialization. He was proud of himself.

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There were five diamonds. As Mrs. Ttlutllankl's voice said, "Why Klankli, you ass! What a damn silly thing to do! You know you promised never to do it again," Mr. Pedigree gathered them up, popped them into a box, put the box into a self-locking drawer and started pressing buttons.

The picture of a court of law flashed on the television screen on the wall behind Mr. Pedigree. PERMANENT CRIMINAL COURT, WORLD CENTER THREE, said the caption, JUDGE BINKS PRESIDING. Judge Binks peered out from beneath his symbolical wig, hard old eyes resting with a flicker of recognition on the Ttlutllankl family, whose images were being beamed on to a duplicate screen in his courthouse.

"Klankli Ttlutllankl," Mr. Pedigree was saying into a microphone on his desk, "age two hundred and nine, an Albenil citizen, resident on Albenil, charged with smuggling five Albenil diamonds valued at thirty-two thousand Earth-dollars in contravention of Earth Law twelve thousand six hundred and twelve. . . ."

"How do you plead, Klankli Ttlutllankl?" the voice of the Clerk of the Court asked a few minutes later.

"Guilty, Your Honor," Klankli said with every appearance of remorse and humility.

"The diamonds will be confiscated and you will pay a fine of ten thousand Earth-dollars or their Albenil equivalent," Judge Binks said, passing judgment. "If you do not wish to pay, or cannot, the alternative is ten years residence on a Lunar Corrective Settlement."

Klankli Ttlutllankl shuddered. Mrs. Ttlutllankl already had her wallet out.

"One, two, three, four, five," Mr. Pedigree counted happily. "And five. Ten thousand dollars, correct. Thank you, Mrs. Ttlutllankl."

"To hell with you, Pedigree," Mrs. Ttlutllankl answered calmly. "Can we go now?"

Mr. Pedigree glanced at the clock on the wall, saying five past four, and at Baby Rufus, whose mandibles were gnashing in a furious manner. He winced. "Yes," he said. "Yes, you may go now."

A few hours later, in the luxurious London hotel which specialized in catering for the needs of well-off Albenili, Mr. and Mrs. Ttlutllankl waited until the door of their suite had closed behind the manager. For several moments they faced one another, rubbing antennae affectionately. Then Mr. Ttlutllankl said tenderly, "How beautiful you are, my love. Your eyes are like forest glades." A sensitive and poetical race, the Albenili — and practical as well, for a few moments later Klankli Ttlutllankl was on the telephone, saying, "Hatton Garden Diamond Exchange? Is Mr. Rufus Polax in the building? . . . Hello, Rufus? We've arrived. Come over."

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While her husband telephoned, Mrs. Ttlutllankl went to the place where Baby Rufus lay immobile on his trolley. She took a screwdriver from a compartment in her carapace and removed his head. Then she reached into the orifice behind and pressed a switch. One of her tentacles went out, effortlessly lifting Rufus's carapace. Except for a small compartment containing the machinery which caused Rufus's mandibles to gnash furiously every six hours, in a most realistic fashion, his collossal body was hollow.

Mr. Ttlutllankl came to stand at his wife's side. Together they spent a long time staring down at the contents of their unnatural child. Hundredweights of diamonds. Tons, literally, of diamonds. "Ah, well," Mr. Ttlutllankl said. "That's that. Never have to do it again, my dear, will we now?"

Coming Next Month

The cover story of our next issue, on the stands around February 1, will be Poul Anderson's short novelet, *Superstition* — an adventure-story of an astonishing future in which the Earth-Mars spacerun demands the services of a qualified witch. There'll be two other long stories: *Night Sequence*, a vivid novelet of time travel by Old Time Master J. B. Priestley; and *North Wind*, the latest of Chad Oliver's always fascinating studies in the anthropology of alien planets. In addition you'll find the usual assortment of shorter tales new and old, by Ray Bradbury, Saki and others, including, of all people, ABC's ace newscaster John W. Vandercook — plus Charles Beaumont's quarterly column on science fiction films and F&SF's annual survey of the best science-fantasy books published during the year just past.

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C. S. Lewis, of Magdalene College, Cambridge, is one of the outstanding lay theologians of the Church of England; but he is better known, I imagine, to F&SF readers as the creator of two distinguished series of imaginative stories: the fantasies of Narnia for children, of which the latest is THE MAGICIAN'S NEPHEW *(Macmillan, 1955), and for adults that unique group of science fiction novels which began with* OUT OF THE SILENT PLANET *(Macmillan, 1943). His first story in any American fantasy magazine is unrelated to either of these series; it's a quietly disturbing sketch of — But the nature of the subject-matter is, for the first part of the story, Mr. Lewis' secret.*

The Shoddy Lands

by C. S. LEWIS

BEING, AS I BELIEVE, OF SOUND mind and in normal health, I am sitting down at eleven P.M. to record, while the memory of it is still fresh, the curious experience I had this morning.

It happened in my rooms in college, where I am now writing, and began in the most ordinary way with a call on the telephone. "This is Durward," the voice said. "I'm speaking from the porter's lodge. I'm in Oxford for a few hours. Can I come across and see you?" I said yes, of course. Durward is a former pupil and a decent enough fellow; I would be glad to see him again. When he turned up at my door a few moments later I was rather annoyed to find that he had a young woman in tow. I loathe either men or women who speak as if they were coming to see you alone and then spring a husband or a wife, a fiancé or a fiancée on you. One ought to be warned.

The girl was neither very pretty nor very plain, and of course she ruined the conversation. We couldn't talk about any of the things Durward and I had in common because that would have meant leaving her out in the cold. And she and Durward couldn't talk about the things they (presumably) had in common because that would have left me out. He introduced her as Peggy and said they were engaged. After that, the three of us just sat and did social patter about the weather and the news.

I tend to stare when I am bored.

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and I am afraid I must have stared at that girl, without the least interest, a good deal. At any rate I was certainly doing so at the moment when the strange experience began. Quite suddenly, without any faintness or nausea or anything of that sort, I found myself in a wholly different place. The familiar room vanished; Durward and Peggy vanished. I was alone. And I was standing up.

My first idea was that something had gone wrong with my eyes. I was not in darkness, nor even in twilight, but everything seemed curiously blurred. There was a sort of daylight, but when I looked up I didn't see anything that I could very confidently call a sky. It might, just possibly, be the sky of a very featureless, dull, grey day, but it lacked any suggestion of distance. "Nondescript" was the word I would have used to describe it. Lower down and closer to me, there were upright shapes, vaguely green in colour, but of a very dingy green. I peered at them for quite a long time before it occurred to me that they might be trees. I went nearer and examined them; and the impression they made on me is not easy to put into words. "Trees of a sort," or, "Well, trees, if you call *that* a tree," or, "An attempt at trees," would come near it. They were the crudest, shabbiest apology for trees you could imagine. They had no real anatomy, even no real branches; they were more like lamp-posts with great, shapeless blobs of green stuck on top of them. Most children could draw better trees from memory.

It was while I was inspecting them that I first noticed the light: a steady, silvery gleam some distance away in the Shoddy Wood. I turned my steps toward it at once, and then first noticed what I was walking on. It was comfortable stuff, soft and cool and springy to the feet; but when you looked down it was horribly disappointing to the eye. It was, in a very rough way, the colour of grass; the colour grass has on a very dull day when you look at it while thinking pretty hard about something else. But there were no separate blades in it. I stooped down and tried to find them; the closer one looked, the vaguer it seemed to become. It had in fact just the same smudged, unfinished quality as the trees: shoddy.

The full astonishment of my adventure was now beginning to descend on me. With it came fear, but, even more, a sort of disgust. I doubt if it can be fully conveyed to anyone who has not had a similar experience. I felt as if I had suddenly been banished from the real, bright, concrete, and prodigally complex world into some sort of second-rate universe that had all been put together on the cheap; by an imitator. But I kept on walking toward the silvery light.

Here and there in the shoddy grass there were patches of what looked, from a distance, like flowers.

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But each patch, when you came close to it, was as bad as the trees and the grass. You couldn't make out what species they were supposed to be. And they had no real stems or petals; they were mere blobs. As for the colours, I could do better myself with a shilling paint-box.

I should have liked very much to believe that I was dreaming, but somehow I knew I wasn't. My real conviction was that I had died. I wished — with a fervour that no other wish of mine has ever achieved — that I had lived a better life.

A disquieting hypothesis, as you see, was forming in my mind. But next moment it was gloriously blown to bits. Amidst all that shoddiness I came suddenly upon daffodils. Real daffodils, trim and cool and perfect. I bent down and touched them; I straightened my back again and gorged my eyes on their beauty. And not only their beauty but — what mattered to me even more at that moment — their, so to speak, honesty; real, honest, finished daffodils, live things that would bear examination.

But where, then, could I be? What world could have shoddy trees and grass and wildflowers, but true daffodils?

"I give it up," thought I. "Let's get on to that light. Perhaps everything will be made clear there. Perhaps it is at the centre of this queer place."

I reached the light sooner than I expected, but when I reached it I had something else to think about. For now I met the Walking Things. I have to call them that, for "people" is just what they weren't. They were of human size and they walked on two legs; but they were, for the most part, no more like true men than the Shoddy Trees had been like trees. They were indistinct. Though they were certainly not naked, you couldn't make out what sort of clothes they were wearing, and though there was a pale blob at the top of each, you couldn't say they had faces. At least that was my first impression. Then I began to notice curious exceptions. Every now and then one of them became partially distinct; a face, a hat, or a dress would stand out in full detail. The odd thing was that the distinct clothes were always women's clothes, but the distinct faces were always those of men. Both facts made the crowd — at least, to a man of my type — about as uninteresting as it could possibly be. The male faces were not the sort I cared about; a flashy-looking crew — gigolos, fripoons. But they seemed pleased enough with themselves. Indeed they all wore the same look of fatuous admiration.

I now saw where the light was coming from. I was in a sort of street. At least, behind the crowd of Walking Things on each side, there appeared to be shop-windows, and from these the light came. I thrust my way through the crowd on my left — but my thrusting seemed to

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yield no physical contacts.— and had a look at one of the shops.

Here I had a new surprise. It was a jeweller's, and after the vagueness and general rottenness of most things in that queer place, the sight fairly took my breath away. Everything in that window was perfect; every facet on every diamond distinct, every brooch and tiara finished down to the last perfection of intricate detail. It was good stuff too, as even I could see; there must have been hundreds of thousands of pounds' worth of it. "Thank Heaven!" I gasped. "But will it keep on?" Hastily I looked at the next shop. It *was* keeping on. This window contained women's frocks. I'm no judge, so I can't say how good they were. The great thing was that they were real, clear, palpable. The shop beyond this one sold women's shoes. And it was still keeping on. They were real shoes; the toe-pinching and very high-heeled sort which, to my mind, ruins even the prettiest foot, but at any rate real.

I was just thinking to myself that some people would not find this place half so dull as I did, when the queerness of the whole thing came over me afresh. "Where the Hell," I began, but immediately changed it to "Where on earth" (for the other word seemed, in all the circumstances, singularly unfortunate) — "Where on earth have I got to? Trees no good; grass no good; sky no good; flowers no good, except the daffodils; people no good; shops, first class. What can that possibly mean?"

The shops, by the way, were all women's shops, so I soon lost interest in them. I walked the whole length of that street, and then, a little way ahead, I saw sunlight.

Not that it was proper sunlight, of course. There was no break in the dull sky to account for it, no beam slanting down. All that, like so many other things in that world, had not been attended to. There was simply a patch of sunlight on the ground, unexplained, impossible (except that it was there) and therefore not at all cheering; hideous, rather, and disquieting. But I had little time to think about it; for something in the centre of that lighted patch — something I had taken for a small building — suddenly moved, and with a sickening shock I realised that I was looking at a gigantic human shape. It turned round. Its eyes looked straight into mine.

It was not only gigantic, but it was the only complete human shape I had seen since I entered that world. It was female. It was lying on sunlit sand, on a beach apparently, though there was no trace of any sea. It was very nearly naked, but it had a wisp of some brightly coloured stuff round its hips and another round its breasts; like what a modern girl wears on a real beach. The general effect was repulsive, but I saw in a moment or two that this was due to the appalling size. Considered ab-

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stractly, the giantess had a good figure; almost a perfect figure, if you like the modern type. The face — but as soon as I had really taken in the face, I shouted out,

"Oh, I say! There you are. Where's Durward? And where's this? What's happened to us?"

But the eyes went on looking straight at me and through me. I was obviously invisible and inaudible to her. But there was no doubt who she was. She was Peggy. That is, she was recognisable; but she was Peggy changed. I don't mean only the size. As regards the figure, it was Peggy improved. I don't think anyone could have denied that. As to the face, opinions might differ. I would hardly have called the change an improvement myself. There was no more — I doubt if there was as much — sense or kindness or honesty in this face than in the original Peggy's. But it was certainly more regular. The teeth in particular, which I had noticed as a weak point in the old Peggy, were perfect, as in a good denture. The lips were fuller. The complexion was so perfect that it suggested a very expensive doll. The expression I can best describe by saying that Peggy now looked exactly like the girl in all the advertisements.

If I had to marry either I should prefer the old, unimproved Peggy. But even in Hell I hoped it wouldn't come to that.

And, as I watched, the background — the absurd little bit of sea-beach — began to change. The giantess stood up. She was on a carpet. Walls and windows and furniture grew up around her. She was in a bedroom. Even I could tell it was a very expensive bedroom though not at all my idea of good taste. There were plenty of flowers, mostly orchids and roses, and these were even better finished than the daffodils had been. One great bouquet (with a card attached to it) was as good as any I have ever seen. A door which stood open behind her gave me a view into a bathroom which I should rather like to own, a bathroom with a sunk bath. In it there was a French maid fussing about with towels and bath salts and things. The maid was not nearly so finished as the roses, or even the towels, but what face she had looked more French than any real Frenchwoman's could.

The gigantic Peggy now removed her beach equipment and stood up naked in front of a full-length mirror. Apparently she enjoyed what she saw there; I can hardly express how much I didn't. Partly the size (it's only fair to remember that) but, still more, something that came as a terrible shock to me, though I suppose modern lovers and husbands must be hardened to it. Her body was (of course) brown, like the bodies in the sun-bathing advertisements. But round her hips, and again round her breasts, where the coverings had been, there were two bands of dead white which looked, by

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contrast, like leprosy. It made me for the moment almost physically sick. What staggered me was that she could stand and admire it. Had she no idea how it would affect ordinary male eyes? A very disagreeable conviction grew in me that this was a subject of no interest to her; that all her clothes and bath salts and two-piece swim-suits, and indeed the voluptuousness of her every look and gesture, had not, and never had had, the meaning which every man would read, and was intended to read, into them. They were a huge overture to an opera in which she had no interest at all; a coronation procession with no Queen at the centre of it; gestures, gestures about nothing.

And now I became aware that two noises had been going on for a long time; the only noises I ever heard in that world. But they were coming from outside, from somewhere beyond that low, grey covering which served the Shoddy Lands instead of a sky. Both the noises were knockings; patient knockings, infinitely remote, as if two outsiders, two excluded people, were knocking on the walls of that world. The one was faint, but hard; and with it came a voice saying, "Peggy, Peggy, let me in." Durward's voice, I thought. But how shall I describe the other knocking? It was, in some curious way, soft; "soft as wool and sharp as death," soft but unendurably heavy, as if at each blow some enormous hand fell on the outside of the Shoddy Sky and covered it completely. And with that knocking came a voice at whose sound my bones turned to water: "Child, child, child, let me in before the night comes."

Before the night comes — instantly common daylight rushed back upon me. I was in my own rooms again and my two visitors were before me. They did not appear to notice that anything unusual had happened to me, though, for the rest of that conversation, they might well have supposed I was drunk. I was so happy. Indeed, in a way I was drunk; drunk with the sheer delight of being back in the real world, free, outside the horrible little prison of that land. There were birds singing close to a window; there was real sunlight falling on a panel. That panel needed repainting; but I could have gone down on my knees and kissed its very shabbiness — the precious real, solid thing it was. I noticed a tiny cut on Durward's cheek where he must have cut himself shaving that morning; and I felt the same about it. Indeed anything was enough to make me happy; I mean, any Thing, as long as it really was a Thing.

Well, those are the facts; everyone may make what he pleases of them. My own hypothesis is the obvious one which will have occurred to most readers. It may be too obvious; I am quite ready to consider rival theories. My view is that by the operation of some unknown

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psychological — or pathological — law, I was, for a second or so, let into Peggy's mind; at least to the extent of seeing her world, the world as it exists for her. At the centre of that world is a swollen image of herself, remodeled to be as like the girls in the advertisements as possible. Round this are grouped clear and distinct images of the things she really cares about. Beyond that, the whole earth and sky are a vague blur. The daffodils and roses are especially instructive. Flowers only exist for her if they are the sort that can be cut and put in vases or sent as bouquets; flowers in themselves, flowers as you see them in the woods, are negligible.

As I say, this is probably not the only hypothesis which will fit the facts. But it has been a most disquieting experience. Not only because I am sorry for poor Durward. Suppose this sort of thing were to become common? And how if, some other time, I were not the explorer but the explored?

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Science-fantasy represents only a small part of Miriam Allen deFord's prolific and varied output. Of all the many topics she's treated, she's probably best known for her skillful stories of crime, fictional and factual; now she brings us a criminous fantasy, in which an adventure (or one might, like Moberley and Jourdain, capitalize that to An Adventure) enables an elderly woman to save a girl from a snatch that has gone awry in time.

Martie and I

by MIRIAM ALLEN DEFORD

I KNEW IT ALL, THE MINUTE I SAW the man again — one of the two who were in the doorway that day. I saw him downtown, when I was on my way to police headquarters to report Martie missing. It all came flooding back to me, just as clear as if it had happened yesterday instead of nearly 50 years ago.

And Martie had been gone for three days.

I had to rescue Martie. Nobody else could do it — nobody else could understand what had happened to her. But I realized at once that if I told the police about seeing that man, they'd ask right away why I connected him with Martie. And then if I told them the truth, they would simply lock me up as insane. The man was obviously not more than 30 years old.

Of course I could have pretended that I'd seen them together once — and heavens knows she's been running around with some pretty awful characters — but I knew what would happen next if I did that. They'd give me pictures to look at from the rogues' gallery, and then if I recognized the man — and I knew he must be a member of some criminal gang — they'd pull him in and question him; they'd have me down to identify him, and of course he'd say he'd never heard of her, and ask me when and where I ever saw them together. And naturally, I never did. It was *me* he was with, that day when I was twenty-one instead of 69. So they'd have to let him go for lack of evidence, and that would warn the gang — and if Martie was still alive, that would finish it.

Please believe me, Martie isn't truly a bad girl. I know; I ought to know. I've raised her since she was two. She's wild, perhaps, and dis-

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contented and rebellious, but I'll never believe she's done anything really wrong. She got into bad company, working in that restaurant — the kind of people she was ashamed to let me meet. And way back in high school, she'd stopped bringing even her nice friends home. I could understand it, though it hurt. When Joe bought this house, it was a nice house in a nice neighborhood. But the town has grown so, with all the new workers coming in during the war, that now this street is next door to a slum, and the house is shabby and run down too. It's no home for a girl like Martie. But it's all I have since Joe passed away, and even if I become the last respectable person left in the block, this is where I'll have to live till I die.

I oughtn't to say, perhaps, how pretty Martie is, because she's the spitting image of me when I was her age — but I guess that doesn't matter, now I'm old. She's always been just as loving and sweet to me as she could be. But there's no getting away from it; a grandmother is no fit person to raise a child all alone. There's too much gap between the generations; and I'd raised my own and it was hard to have to start all over again. I had no choice, though. Gertrude was our only child, and when she and her husband, Fred, were killed in that bus crash there was nobody else to look after Martie. Joe had been gone five years, then.

I did everything I could for her. She had the same things as other girls, and she had proper food and I taught her good manners and sent her to church and Sunday school. And I loved her — I do love her. Only you can't expect much in the way of confidences between a girl of twenty-two and a woman of nearly 70. I wanted her to do office or store work, or get in some nice trade like being a beautician, and I never approved of her working in that showy restaurant — but how could I stop her? I scolded a lot at first, when she began keeping such dreadful hours, and when men I didn't like the looks of at all began driving up to the door and never even got out but just honked till she flew out to drive off with them. She was using too much make-up, too, and I thought it was terrible when she bleached her pretty light brown hair that was just like mine used to be. But scolding would only have driven her away from me altogether, so I kept my mouth shut after a while and just stood by to be there if she needed me.

And now she did need me.

And now I was sure that that strange, impossible thing, that happened to me so long ago, in some queer outlandish way was the explanation of what had happened to her.

But nobody, nobody on earth, would believe me.

I kept remembering how for a week before she disappeared she would come home every night after work and mope around the house. I

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could see she was worried about something, and finally I said, "Martie, is anything wrong?" "Certainly not!" she snapped at me; and then she kind of got hold of herself and laughed and put her arm around me and said, "That's all the gratitude I get for being a good girl and staying home with you for a change!" But I didn't like the laugh, and I screwed up my courage and asked, "Martie, are you in trouble?"

The tears came to her eyes — and I hadn't seen Martie cry since she was ten. She kissed me and laughed again — it was a real laugh this time — and said, "Not the kind you're afraid of, you dear old-fashioned thing! I can take care of myself."

There was a pause, and then she said, very low, "Or can I? What worries me is, I know too much."

She shut up then like a clam, and not another word could I get out of her.

It was only two days later that she didn't come home all night.

That had happened once or twice before, and I didn't get really scared till the next afternoon, when the manager of that restaurant called up and wanted to know why she hadn't come to work. I told a lie for her, said she wasn't feeling well and would be in the next day — but she'd never missed work before. I didn't know what to do. Maybe, I thought, she'd just got into some party or something that had lasted so late she'd stayed with one of her girl friends. Then she'd surely be home soon or at least would call me. But it got to be evening, and she hadn't. I went out and bought a paper and went over it column by column to see if there was news of any auto accident or anything like that, but there wasn't any with a Marta Wood involved — or with any unidentified girl. To tell the truth, I was afraid to phone the hospitals or the police; in the bottom of my heart was the dread that at last the way she's been going on had caught up with her. Every time I thought of the possibility that my granddaughter might be under arrest for something, I felt sick.

But when it was the second night and still no word, I knew I had to face it. The next morning I put on my hat and coat and put some snapshots of Martie in my bag, and started down to headquarters to report her missing.

It was a lovely day in May, just like that one 48 years ago, though a few days later in the month. I even passed the same street where they kidnaped me — though I was in a bus this time, instead of walking as I was then.

It was when I'd got out of the bus and was walking the two blocks to police headquarters that I saw the man. I recognized him right way; it was like a sword going through me.

He was just walking down the street past me, minding his own business. But the instant I laid eyes on him, the whole thing came back

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to me, every last frightening detail of it.

And I realized then what must have happened to my Martie.

I nearly fainted, right there on the sidewalk. I had to stop and look in a store window till I could get over being dizzy.

Because at the same instant I realized it would be no use whatever to tell the police or anyone else what I knew, or to get myself tangled up in it by going to the police at all. Anybody on earth would decide I was crazy. I could just hear some polite police sergeant: "Now, Mrs. Newcomb, you mustn't let your imagination run away with you. Things like that don't happen."

I know they don't. But this one did.

And suppose I still tried to tell them, suppose they showed me the rogues' gallery pictures and I could identify that man, what good would that do? The police can't hold even a gangster, or go after his accomplices, on no grounds except a girl's remark that she knew too much and her grandmother's crazy tale about something that happened before anybody concerned was born. All I'd accomplish would be to get myself committed to an asylum. Any doctor would certify me on the basis of my story.

I know — I keep putting off telling it. It's so weird I wouldn't believe it myself if somebody else told me about it. But it did happen, and I'm not crazy.

I can remember every last little bit of it — even what I was wearing. It was a white challis with little violets sprinkled all over the material, and I wasn't wearing a coat because it was so warm for May. I had a leghorn hat on, with a white tulle bow. And I wore white silk gloves, because mother always said no lady ever went out of the house, even to the corner mailbox, without gloves.

She was making a summer dress for me that day. She had it almost done, but she needed — don't laugh — some short whalebones for the basque (yes, even in a summer dress) and some of the little lead discs we used to sew into tape inside the skirt hem, to keep our long skirts down so nobody would ever see our ankles.

You can see how long ago it was!

It was such a lovely day I decided to walk downtown and take the trolley back. Downtown was only about a mile from our house. The town was so much smaller then, more compact — there were only three trolley lines, and we walked a lot more than they ever do now. We didn't wear such high heels, for one thing.

So there I was, just strolling along, not thinking about anything in particular (except maybe about Joe; I'd just met him), and I'd got as far as Moore Street between Haven and South, about halfway to the store. There was a vacant lot on one side, full of weeds, and a factory on the

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other. There wasn't anybody around but me, that I could see. It was about three o'clock, and most people were indoors at work.

I heard footsteps behind me, but I didn't pay any attention. And then all of a sudden my heart felt as if somebody had grabbed hold of it and squeezed it. Something round and cold and hard was pressed against the back of my neck, and a man's voice said quietly, "Don't look around and don't make any noise. Just keep on walking."

My knees shook, but I managed to keep going while I tried to figure out what to do. I remembered stories I'd read about white slavers, and that was the only thing I could think of. I looked around frantically for somebody to help me, but there wasn't a soul in sight. He took the thing away from my neck but I knew he had it ready if I made a false move, and I knew that it was a pistol.

And everything around me looked all funny and different. A few people who appeared on the street paid no attention to me — I suppose to them it just looked as if the man happened to be walking behind me. They were all dressed queerly; one woman who passed us showed her legs clear above her calves. She did glance at me, but only as if my perfectly ordinary appearance was something odd.

The trolley tracks were gone, and a big thing was lumbering down the block that looked like an old-fashioned stagecoach without horses. There wasn't a horse and wagon or a carriage in sight, only strange-looking automobiles.

I'd seen plenty of automobiles, of course — horseless carriages, we mostly called them then. But they were like real carriages, as much as possible — some of them even had a place for the whip. And they were open cars, with a door in the rear. These I saw now were closed, with doors on both sides, and they were awfully long and low and sort of slinky-looking. I see hundreds like them today, but I don't think a single closed car had been manufactured at that time.

At the corner the man said, "Turn left. And don't open your mouth or I'll shoot."

We walked another two blocks that way, and then we turned into Green Street. We came to a big building that looked like a warehouse, but empty and marked "For Sale." It had a deep doorway, and two men were standing in the shadows in the back. And at the curb in front of the building was one of those huge automobiles.

The man behind me, the one who had the pistol, ordered, "Stand still. Make out like you're looking around for some address in the block."

He must have given some kind of signal then, for the two men in the doorway stepped out quickly. I got a good look at the face of one of them — the only one of the three I ever saw to recognize him again.

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He was the one that tied my hands together behind my back. The other one with him stepped quickly behind me and blindfolded me with something that felt like a silk handkerchief. Then he tied something over my mouth — I was too scared to scream, if they'd known it — and I felt them pushing and hustling me into the car. They must have waited till the block was clear, so nobody would notice them. I was too frightened and confused to wonder at the strangeness of everything — and I was still certain sure I was being abducted by white slavers.

We started out, and for a few blocks I kept track of the direction, but then we kept turning and going on for what seemed miles and miles. I knew we must be way outside the town limits, and yet the car kept running smoothly over what felt like a paved road — when I knew that the macadam paving stopped only half a mile or so from where we had started, and that all the roads outside that were rough dirt.

We stopped at last, and two of them pulled me out of the car and across a sidewalk and up some steps. I could hear a bell buzz somewhere, and then we went through a door and up a hallway.

The next thing I knew we were in an elevator. By this time I was half out of my mind. I couldn't begin to imagine where we were; to the best of my knowledge, there were just four elevators in town, two in hotels and two in stores. I wondered if we'd just driven round and round and wound up at the Grand or the Palace; but surely you didn't need to ring a doorbell to get into a hotel in broad daylight!

The elevator went up and up — far higher than in any building I'd ever heard of, in our town or in any other city either. It stopped, and the door opened and they shoved me out and over a threshold. They just left me standing there.

There was a moment's silence, and then a man's voice said, "Who's this?"

I'd heard the voices of all the three men, and this was a new one.

The man who had the pistol said, "It's the girl you wanted, chief."

"You damned fool," the new voice exclaimed. "That's not the girl!"

"Not the girl? Are you sure, chief? I couldn't go wrong from those pictures you gave us."

"Of course I'm sure, you idiot! There's a resemblance, but just look at her! She looks like a refugee from a costume ball. Where on earth did you find her?"

"But I was certain —"

"I'm telling you that isn't the little rat. You've made a bad mess of things. Now get her away from here, quick."

One of the other men said, "Chief, she might talk if we let her go. Better let us take care of her."

The man they called chief sounded angry, though he didn't raise his voice.

"*I* give the orders here," he said

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sharply. "Do as I tell you. I've got enough on my shoulders already, with that dame singing, without a beef like this to handle too. Take her far enough away and turn her loose."

I was bewildered — if he was talking about me, I certainly hadn't been singing, or felt like it; I was a girl, not a dame, which is an old-fashioned word for an elderly lady; and I couldn't imagine what any of this had to do with beef.

Then his menacing voice sounded right in front of me.

"As for you, miss — you keep your mouth closed about all this or we'll find you, wherever you are, and close it for you. Do you understand?"

I was too frightened to do anything but nod.

"And you, you —"

"Honest, chief, I —"

"Well, I guess, at that, I ought to've sent somebody along who really knew her — only I thought that might make her suspicious. O.K., forget it; I'll manage it better the next time.

"They really do look a lot alike, except for the color hair and the wild clothes — she even had me puzzled for a second or two at first.

"Take her away, boys."

That was the last I heard; they were pushing me out of the room again.

We went down in the elevator and out of the building and into the car, and this time they drove zigzag for about ten minutes. Then they pulled me out, and one of them untied my hands and said hurriedly, "You'll be all right now, miss. Just a little mistake, and no harm done." But another growled, "You heard what the chief told you. Don't pull off that blindfold or the gag till you've heard us leave — or you'll be plenty sorry."

I couldn't have moved if I'd wanted to; my hands were cramped and stiff from being tied. I heard the car go, and then I fumbled at the knots a long time until I got both the things off. One was a silk handkerchief, as I'd thought it was, and the other was a man's tie, cut in a shape I'd never seen before, and with hideously bright colors.

I found myself standing by the side of a dirt road, way out in the country somewhere. There wasn't a house in sight, only thin woods on both sides of the road.

And yet I'd felt that automobile drive on some kind of smooth paving right up to the minute it stopped; and I hadn't moved two paces from where they'd left me.

I held on to the handkerchief and the tie, thinking maybe they'd be some kind of evidence, if I could ever get up the nerve to talk. I stood there wondering how I was ever going to get back to town. I looked at my silver chatelaine watch, and it was quarter to five. The whole thing had happened in less than two hours.

I started to walk along the road, without even knowing in which direction I was from home. After a

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few minutes I heard a clip-clop, and a rig caught up with me; it was a trap with an old man in it who looked like a farmer. I held up my arm and he stopped.

"Which way is it to Middle City?" I asked.

He stared at me curiously — I certainly wasn't dressed for a walk in the country, and I must have looked pretty mussed and upset besides.

"About eight miles down this way," he said, pointing ahead in the same direction we were going. From the position of the sun that meant that I was north of town.

"I don't suppose you could take me some of the way?" I glanced inside my purse. All I had was 50 cents.

He looked me over some more in silence. Then he said grudgingly, "How'd you get out here in the first place?"

I had an inspiration. "I — I was buggy-riding with a friend," I faltered.

He cackled.

"Had to get out and walk, eh? Well, I admire your spunk, young lady. Hop in. Happens I was on my way to see my daughter in town anyway."

"Oh, thank you!" I breathed fervently. "Just drop me at the end of the nearest trolley line."

I got home before six. It wasn't till I was walking through our front gate that I realized I'd left the tie and the handkerchief in the old man's carriage. I didn't even know his name, or he mine, so I never could get them back to use as proof that I hadn't dreamed the whole thing.

"Well, what kept you so long?" mother demanded. "And where are the things I sent you for?"

I knew by then that I simply couldn't tell her or anyone the truth. It was too fantastic, and heaven knows what she'd have thought I was trying to hide by making up such a wild story. So I improvised feebly: "I'm sorry, mother, I never got to the store. I met Maud and she made me go home with her. I'll go downtown again for you tomorrow."

"Of all the scatterbrains!" she scolded. "Well, go set the table. Supper's nearly ready and your father will be home any minute."

I don't know yet what really happened to me that day. I was reading an article lately in a magazine, about how time isn't real, or something — how maybe sometimes people get accidentally out of their own time and into another. It was mostly about two ladies who visited Versailles, in France. It was too deep for me — I couldn't make sense out of it.

Only, if they got somehow into the past, could I have slipped somehow into the future — the future then, that is the present now?

Anyway that's my story. And now you can see why I alone had any clue to a way to rescue Martie.

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All I had was my memories and my reasoning power.

There were two places I could connect with — the warehouse where they kidnaped me, and the hideout where they took me. After three days, it wasn't likely that Martie was still being held in the apartment or penthouse or whatever it was. I might as well face it: if she wasn't dead she was being kept a prisoner somewhere while they decided what to do with her, and the warehouse was as likely a place as any.

If I could get into that, somehow, and find Martie and save her — *if!* — then I'd have a legitimate reason to go to the police right away, and it oughtn't to be too hard for them to locate the hideout of the rest of the gang and their chief. It must be in one of the northern subdivisions, about eight miles north — that would probably mean Homefield Acres — and there couldn't be many apartment houses in a suburb like that, especially tall ones with an elevator.

The warehouse, I knew, was on Green Street; I even knew the block. The rest was up to me. I wasn't being brave. I was just the only one who *could* do it, and I was too desperate to be frightened.

You know I did do it — it was in all the papers: "Grandma Rescues Gun Moll," and silly stuff like that: Martie was *never* a gun moll, just a foolish girl who fell in with the wrong kind of associates. She's on probation now, and everything's going to be all right.

But till now, nobody has ever known the real story behind it.

The details aren't important. I'm not a fool; I know I'm 69 years old, and not as slender as I used to be, and with rheumatism in my right knee. I couldn't break into buildings or climb fire-escapes or face gangsters armed with submachine guns. I had to use my wits.

I went down in daylight to find the place. There it was, just as I remembered it; I'd probably passed it a hundred times since without thinking of it. It looked abandoned and the "For Sale" sign was dirty and faded, but I had to follow my hunch since I had nothing else to follow. The neighborhood is rundown and dilapidated: a few cheap-looking stores, another warehouse belonging to a small moving firm, and across the street a row of old, shabby houses, most of them low-class rooming-houses. I located a drugstore a block away with a pay phone in it, and went back home.

About 9 o'clock I went downtown again. In my bag I had a heavy piece of fused glass I've used for years as a paperweight. I got off the bus about two blocks away, went to the phone booth in the drugstore, and called the police.

"Somebody's trying to break into a warehouse on Green Street," I said. "I just saw two men sneak into the alley on the side and I heard a window break." I gave them the

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exact location and then I hung up before they could ask who I was; let them think I was somebody snooping from a window of one of the houses across the way.

I hurried back, and thanked my stars when I saw there was nobody but me in sight. It was a dark night, and there was only one street light, half a block away. I tiptoed up the alley and picked a ground floor window next to a side door. I took the paperweight out of my bag and with all my might I banged it against the dirty glass. The window broke and I heard the splinters fall inside.

My idea had been then to hide somewhere and wait for the police. When they saw the broken window they would have to search the place, and if Martie was there they'd find her.

Only it didn't happen that way. Before I could move, a hand grabbed my shoulder. Then the door next to me opened with a rusty squeak and somebody reached out and dragged me through it into complete darkness. A hand covered my mouth and I was half-dragged, half-carried across a floor and up some steps.

They must have had a lookout posted at a window who had been watching me.

Another door opened, and I was pushed forward into what seemed a blaze of light, though actually, when I could see again, it was only one ceiling bulb in a large room.

There were some wooden chairs standing about, a table littered with cards and beer cans and ash trays, and in a corner there was a cot with somebody lying on it. Two men stood up from the table when the door opened, and one of them said: "What have you got there?"

I'd never seen him before, but I knew his voice instantly. It was the man who put the pistol at the back of my neck that day. And the other one I recognized; he was the man in the doorway, the one I had just seen downtown.

As I say, you've read it all in the papers, so I'll cut it short. It was Martie, bound and gagged, on the cot; the two men were guarding her till their leader gave them orders to dispose of her. It seems he wanted her held till he could question her — and I know how they'd "question" anybody — to make sure just how much she'd talked, and to whom; then of course they would take her away somewhere and kill her. And now they had me to deal with too, though they had no idea who I was or why I'd tried, as they thought, to break into their hideout. I learned all this while they tied me up and dumped me in a corner near the cot. They had me gagged but I tried every way to catch Martie's eye. I couldn't; either they had her doped or she was sound asleep.

You've read all this, but what you'll never know is what I went through waiting for the police to come and wondering if they were coming at all. Maybe they'd just think it was a crackpot call and pay

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no attention — though surely they'd at least have a prowl car stop by and see if a window was broken. I prayed they wouldn't use a siren, and they didn't. I don't know how long it was; it seemed hours but it must have been only about fifteen minutes before they came.

Then, when it was all over and the men were in custody and I was released — they had to put Martie under arrest too, for investigation, but they took her to the hospital first — they were willing and eager to listen to me about the apartment house in Homefield Acres. That's how they got hold of the "chief."

Only, what they never found out and never will find out is how I knew where to find Martie in the first place — for it was easy to establish that I had nothing to do with the gang. I guess they figured she must have talked to me too, which she never had. It didn't matter, since the whole lot of those criminals were safe in prison.

I wonder what they'd have thought if I'd told them I'd been taken to that warehouse and then to the penthouse headquarters — neither of which had been built — in 1907!

THE BEST FROM FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION: FIFTH SERIES, *to be published by Doubleday in early January, is dedicated to "to Milford, Pennsylvania and Tucson, Arizona for their production of a wholly unfair percentage of the best in fantasy and science fiction." Now Damon Knight, Judith Merril and James Blish, the three sterling reasons for the first part of that dedication, are making tentative plans for a science fiction writers' conference to be held next summer in Milford, some 90 miles from New York. Mr. Knight writes; "Dates, prices, etc. have not been settled, and reservations are not wanted now. What is wanted, if you are interested, is a letter telling something about yourself — experience, training, stories sold (if any), and so on. Later progress reports on the conference will go out directly to qualified people who write now." When people go to Milford, they seem automatically to write better than ever: if this prospect tempts you, write to Damon Knight, Box 164, Milford, Pike Co., Pa.*

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Infidelity can be disaster enough in a marriage: but Miss McClintic, whose fictional prose is as individual and delightful as her verse, shows us that a persistent pride in premarital paramours can be even worse — bad enough, indeed, to make a prosaic businessman turn necromancer.

The Ultimate Price

by WINONA McCLINTIC

MR. AND MRS. MCKENZIE HAD been unhappily married for several years. It was believed that the antagonism had begun on the wedding night. Having five or six hours to kill before bedtime, the newlyweds repaired to the bar of the hotel and began discussion and confession of past indiscretions. The dialogue turned into a contest for superiority over the fifth martini each.

"And then there was Edgar," said Mrs. McKenzie wistfully.

"Nina," mused Mr. McKenzie. "Such vitality!"

"George!" said Mrs. McKenzie a little sharply. "He never got over me!"

"Mary Alice," murmured Mr. McKenzie, not even listening to his bride. "Too innocent and fragile to marry."

"Scottie," Mrs. McKenzie raised her voice a trifle, to the interest of three drunken stockbrokers at the far corner of the bar, "was the most generous man I have ever known, bar none!"

"Ah, Margaret," wondered Mr. McKenzie. "Where now, your soft voice and gentle manner?"

"Maurice was the most courteous of employers," confided Mrs. McKenzie to her empty glass, "the best listener and the nicest friend a girl ever had."

"Genevieve," explained Mr. McKenzie, "never tried pass herself off as girl, once reached majority. No, sweetie, she said — men were Genevieve's meat—consider myself woman every sense of word. Never forget her."

"Sam," Mrs. McKenzie shouted at her husband of a day, "believed that all women, no matter how large or how old, were just little girls at heart. Like little flowers, he insisted, needing to be protected from the elemental forces of nature."

"Can't stand women," Mr. McKenzie sneered at his wife, "refuse

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face reality. Passion common both sexes, hah! Most women passionate as cargo dead tunney fish!"

"Marco and I," said Mrs. McKenzie through taut lips, "spent an entire night together on his fishing boat and watched the sun rise over the harbor. He did not mention his cargo once during the night, having other things to say to me."

"Some dames," Mr. McKenzie appealed to the three drunken stockbrokers for support, "prefer crude, primitive types smell of fish-intestines to men of intellectual pursuits. Not Rose. Always said wanted man something besides 'what's cooking?' after rough day."

The three drunken stockbrokers agreed with Mr. McKenzie. They, too, had known Rose. For some obscure reason, this was the last straw for Mrs. McKenzie. She retired to the hotel room and brooded. Mr. McKenzie stayed below in the bar and drank with his three new friends, staggering to bed at an ungodly hour. The honeymoon lasted two weeks.

After the McKenzies returned to town, they attempted to keep up pretenses in front of their friends. That is, they never had an open quarrel. But everyone soon knew that a battle of the sexes went on daily, and nightly, in that tragic household.

After a marriage of one year and a day, Mrs. McKenzie hoped that she would eventually become a mother. She informed Mr. McKenzie with dignity that she would bear him a son named Michael.

"Daughter," said Mr. McKenzie smugly. "Call her Karen."

"Or Brian," said Mrs. McKenzie, stretching out the vowels, as if she enjoyed pronouncing the name again, after all these years.

"Nice name, Betsy," reflected Mr. McKenzie. "Knew a Betsy once. Some kid!" He laughed offensively.

"James will go to medical school," screamed Mrs. McKenzie, flinging the coffeepot at the father of her son.

Mr. McKenzie left the house whistling and singing "Martha" in an infected voice. Mrs. McKenzie went to the attic and into the trunks in which were stored mementoes of her girlhood. She unwrapped a photograph of a devil-may-care young man, inscribed with the benediction, "All my love, Rudy." Mrs. McKenzie brought this portrait downstairs, put it in a silver frame which formerly had surrounded her Uncle Will, now dead of a liver complaint, God rest his soul, and placed it upon the marble mantelpiece in the drawing room. She arranged small bowls of roses on either side.

Mr. McKenzie came home that evening still humming, carrying a large packet of novels as a surprise for his mate and best critic. The novels were: *Pamela*, *Diana of the Crossways*, *Emma*, *The Four Margarets*, *Amelia*, *Jane Eyre*, *Maggie*, *A Girl of the Streets*, *Mary Olivier*,

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Evalina, The State vs. Elinor Norton, Undine, Anna Karenina, Thais, Alice in Wonderland, Esther Waters, Shirley, Elsie Dinsmore, Camille, Elizabeth and Her German Garden, Ann Vickers, My Antonia, Manon Lescault, Dorothy Vernon of Hadden Hall, Nana, Peg Worthington, The Book of Ruth, Sister Carrie, Cleopatra, Clarissa Harlowe, and *The Private Life of Helen of Troy* by John Erskine.

"Oh, darling, you shouldn't have!" exclaimed Mrs. McKenzie sweetly, overcome by the magnificence of the gift.

"Tut tut," replied Mr. McKenzie, smirking modestly. "Hardly enough for mother of daughter."

The McKenzies were loving all through dinner, and, afterward, as they sat in the twilight of the drawing room, Mrs. McKenzie asked her husband if she should play for him on their glossy black piano. They did not have a television set because the noise might interfere with their dialogues.

"Yes, play," said Mr. McKenzie. "Nothing so soothing as white hands of lovely woman touching keys of glossy black piano and bringing music to living reality."

Mrs. McKenzie smiled graciously and sat down at the small bench. She played in rapid succession: "Robin Adair," "My Name Is John Wellington Wells," "Teddy O'Neill," "Will Ye No' Come Back, Jamie," three songs about John Henry, "Le Bon Roi Dagobert," "Barnacle Bill the Sailor," and a memory of early youth entitled, "My Name is Yon Yonsson, I Come From Wisconsin, I Work in the Lumber Yards There." She sang them all, too.

Mr. McKenzie sat through the concert until the end. With a face as white as cottage cheese, he arose without a word, jammed his hat on his head so hard that it covered his ears, and left for the neighborhood pub. He came home again at three in the morning, singing "Mary of Argyle" in a whisky baritone to the displeasure of the family next door, who played tennis a great deal and felt that it needed its sleep.

The McKenzies did not speak to one another for a full month after this episode, using gestures instead. The vow of silence was broken when Mrs. McKenzie, upon visiting the doctor, was informed that her supposed pregnancy was a false alarm. The rabbits and guinea pigs had been off their feed since Christmas, and, as a result, one could not trust a thing they indicated. Mrs. McKenzie broke the news gently to her husband, and they embraced lovingly and promised to be good, each to the other, until death did them part. Neither of the partners ever mentioned having a baby again, and this was well, as the possibility was out. Only a psychiatrist could have said why.

Spring was in full bloom, and Mrs. McKenzie spent many happy hours among her weeds and flowers.

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Mr. McKenzie, lest she be lonesome all day by herself, brought home a puppy — it was a long-haired collie and neither of them could say whether it inclined to the male or to the female persuasion. This collie grew to magnificant adulthood, and was called "Charlie" by Mrs. McKenzie and "Jeanie" by Mr. McKenzie, because it had light-brown hair. The dog answered to either name, having troubles of its own and not wishing to extend the area.

The marriage continued for another year, and the McKenzies seemed to be cohabiting together as well as might be expected. All of their friends, a sophisticated group of Young Matrons and Rising Businessmen, said frequently and approvingly,

"The McKenzies have Calmed Down."

Alas! This was but the calm before the storm, as it turned out. Mrs. McKenzie could not devote her life entirely to weeds and flowers and large collie dogs; she needed an emotional outlet of a different sort. And Mr. McKenzie, although fascinated by debits and credits and good financial risks, began to feel that life was passing him by, while he fiddled with businessmen's luncheons and telephone calls to New York.

It was spring again in the quiet and tasteful suburb where the McKenzies bided their time, and the tension was mounting with each lovely day. The couple ate breakfast in a pleasant room with a tiled floor and French doors which opened upon the blooming garden. From this nook they could observe bees and things buzzing about, as is the custom of these industrious and fertile creatures. It was bucolic.

One morning Mrs. McKenzie was hunched in a reverie when her husband joined her in the breakfast room. She greeted him languidly as he sat down. Then, sniffing delicately and wistfully, she whispered as if to herself (or to some invisible playmate):

"The magnolias are in bloom."

Mr. McKenzie gave his wife a sharp look. Pointedly, he left his chair and went to the bush which was flowering right beside the first french door. Jeanie (Charlie) was sitting beside it, pondering a slug.

"Sagebrush," said Mr. McKenzie conclusively, sitting down and eating an egg. This direct contradiction seemed to pass unnoticed by Mrs. McKenzie.

"I was so young and joyeuse that summer at Old Point Comfort, Va.," she murmured, and her eyes gleamed as she thought back.

Mr. McKenzie, although infuriated when she spoke French, knew that she had spent a summer in that region, for she had mentioned it once or twice in a bored way. Now he became suspicious. What was the woman playing at?

"Friends there?" he asked slyly, trying to look unconcerned.

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Mrs. McKenzie's eyelids flickered. "One of the finest men I have ever known," she said simply, "a true Southern gentleman."

"Hah!" said Mr. McKenzie shortly, swallowing his coffee as if it were laced with strychnine.

Mrs. McKenzie sat up as stiffly as if she had been reared in Boston and gave her husband a look of deadly contempt.

"His name," Mrs. McKenzie said loudly and clearly, "was Buck T. Beauregarde the III. He had red hair."

"Ha ha ha," laughed Mr. McKenzie coarsely. "III what? Har har har!" He went off to his office singing "Annie Laurie" in a sentimental manner. That day he saw more red-haired men than in the five years before. He began to brood.

Mrs. McKenzie spent every evening playing the songs of Stephen Foster on her glossy black piano and drinking mint juleps. Charlie/Jeanie sat beside her with cocked ears. Mr. McKenzie began to fear that madness was creeping up. In self-defense he went to the Public Library and took out some books on black magic, with special attention to those works dealing in the techniques of summoning devils and evil spirits. At home in his study this harassed businessman experimented with the paraphernalia attendant upon calling up imps. He brewed potions and chanted ritualistic recipes. Nothing happened. Odd. There should have been a plethora of huge black devils with musty wings and repulsive snouts.

One evening Mr. McKenzie swinked in the study at his imp-calling to the faint strains of "Old Black Joe." Mrs. McKenzie, seated at her glossy black piano playing a medley entitled "Memories of Dixie," was disturbed in her contemplation of yams and goobers by a ring at the doorbell. On the doorstep she found a slight, courteous gentleman with a briefcase.

"Mr. McKenzie called me," the visitor said affably, "my name is Leejan."

Mrs. McKenzie took the gentleman to the study and knocked on the door. Then she went away, uninterested in any man who did not have red hair these days.

"Selling?" Mr. McKenzie asked the doctor as soon as the door was closed. He was impatient to get on with his magic.

"It depends upon what you will pay," answered Dr. Leejan, taking some contracts out of his briefcase. "If you offer The Ultimate Price, I can deliver to you those effects for which you have been playing with magic in the evenings."

"You mean . . . ?" asked Mr. McKenzie, surprised.

"Yes!" said Dr. Leejan.

"Mean what? Magic worked, or wasting my time, all the time?"

"Either way you like it," answered Dr. Leejan. "How about the price?"

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"Ultimate Price all right," said Mr. McKenzie, "but arrange business the way I want it."

"What had you in mind?" asked the agent with his gold pencil ready.

"Visualized roll call." Mr. McKenzie waved his hands descriptively. "Line them up, just as described, and make them admit that she was lying about them all."

"All fifty of them?" asked Dr. Leejan, "you seem pretty confident. What if she weren't lying?"

"Had to be," said Mr. McKenzie. "Most of them. Point is, show her up. Ha ha!"

Dr. Leejan observed his client.

"You realize what will happen to her," he said smoothly, "if she confesses to sins but does not repent herself of them?"

"Ultimate Price?"

"Precisely," replied Dr. Leejan. "But, evidently, we don't care about that, do we?"

"Pay for sins," said Mr. McKenzie loftily. "Willing pay for mine." This hag-ridden man had no fear for his own soul because he expected a lot of company in that bourne where his own few but familiar sins would place him.

"Very well," said Dr. Leejan. "At what time should the varnishing take place?"

"Hurry?" asked Mr. McKenzie. He had hoped to have the pleasure of anticipating the look on his wife's face when her supposed past was summoned up, like a row of bad pennies.

"All the time in the world," Dr. Leejan said slowly. "But it is always best to strike while the iron is hot."

This insinuation caught on with Mr. McKenzie. Do it now, he said to himself like any good businessman.

"Drawing room," suggested the plotting husband. "Lined up front of glossy black piano."

"Roger!" said Dr. Leejan, rubbing his hands together briskly. Roger appeared before them slightly transparent but otherwise normal.

"Real?" asked Mr. McKenzie, hoping that this would be the first fraudulent case.

"He is as real as we need," explained Dr. Leejan. "It's just that he's on a different plane of existence." This sounded all right to Mr. McKenzie.

The three men walked into the drawing room and confronted the victim of their scheming.

"Why, Roger!" cried Mrs. McKenzie. "How nice of you to surprise us!"

Roger smiled intimately. Mrs. McKenzie simpered at her nail polish. Mr. McKenzie felt a burning sensation in the central.

"Ulcers," he said to himself. "Murder me for insurance. Frightful! Self-defense." He hardened his arteries and prepared to go through with it.

Dr. Leejan explained to Mrs. McKenzie that they proposed to call up her former lovers, by a secret process which he had invented, pat.

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pending. Pat appeared by the glossy black piano bench, twisting his Gaelic forelock respectfully.

"Ooh, Patsy!" shouted Mrs. McKenzie, carried away by the memory of happy days in Donegal.

"Ah, Mavourneen," whispered Pat, looking nervously at what he took to be the husband, himself.

"False name," muttered Mr. McKenzie. "No end to creature's deceit."

"This is real George," Dr. Leejan introduced the next arrival. George was as slightly transparent as the others, and he wavered in the soft light reflected in the glossy black piano. Mrs. McKenzie threw her arms around this old flame, and he responded in kind.

"Dead earnest," snarled Mr. McKenzie, gnashing his teeth. "Something went on!"

What went on was Ernest, who had been buried in phosphorescent soil, but was still presentable.

"Ernie!" gushed Mrs. McKenzie, kissing the waxy lips. "Then, death is not the end?"

"Disgusting!" said Mr. McKenzie to the talented doctor. "Man still in pall!"

Paul was handsome, too. And Matt, Mark, Luke, John, Peter, the second Timothy, and Angus, while not precisely beautiful, had a flair, as Mr. McKenzie could perceive, which attracted ladies, to his fury. Each of these gallants greeted Mrs. McKenzie as if she were the one true love of his life.

"Fake!" hissed Mr. McKenzie to himself. "Possibly, hallucination. Going batty!"

"When We make a bargain," said Dr. Leejan severely to his client, "We fulfill our part of the contract, honestly and justly. Now," he turned to the rapturous Mrs. McKenzie, who was happier than she had been since the day she and her spouse had become engaged in the Japanese tea garden, "were there any more?"

Mrs. McKenzie looked over the forty or fifty men lined up like a fatigue party in front of the glossy black piano.

"Yes," she sighed, her cup running over. "One more!"

A scent of magnolias filled the room and one hundred fifes and banjoes began playing that magnificent tune which reminds the listener of the War between the States and indigestible fried foods. Mr. McKenzie's heart sickened within him, as a glow appeared beside the row of lesser men, and Buck T. Beauregarde the III, flower of Southern chivalry, gradually took shape. He was about six feet, six inches tall with shoulders to match, wavy dark red hair, flashing black eyes, and a deep and profound drawl. Mr. McKenzie felt his shoulder pads quiver in resentment and a hamstring give way. This was not fair. Even Jeanie * was impressed.

Mrs. McKenzie just naturally swooned away, and Buck T. Beaure-

* Charlie.

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garde the III fanned her with his kerchief and, dripping smelling-salts, drawled,

"Ge-yentlemun, suhs, ki-yundly sta-yund bac' an' ge-yuhve this hyeah le-ittle la-yuhdy uh le-ittle aye-yuh. Yoo, too, sonny," he said kindly to Mr. McKenzie.

"Last straw," Mr. McKenzie decided. "Challenge the man. Pistols or something, forty paces." He stepped up to Beauregarde the III and struck him in the face. His hand went all the way through, but the point was taken.

"Mah cyard, suh," Beauregarde handed Mr. McKenzie a dimly seen piece of paper, which dissolved as soon as the tormented man touched it. Mrs. McKenzie revived.

"Oh, Buck!" she squeaked. "Oh, *honey!*"

"Proof?" Mr. McKenzie asked Dr. Leejan.

The doctor nodded and said, "But We must still give her a chance to deny it and them, all of them."

"Or any," said Mr. McKenzie, but his heart was not in it.

Dr. Leejan cleared his throat, and the collection of lovers snapped to attention, even Beauregarde the III and Mrs. McKenzie.

"Do you, Mrs. McKenzie," questioned Dr. Leejan, "take these men to have been your lovers, though richer though poorer, for better for worse, in sickness and in health, till death do you all part?"

"Wrong lines," growled Mr. McKenzie. "Still, covers the subject."

In spite of his burning jealousy, he felt ready to forgive his wife, if she would deny just one lover, especially the last apparition. But Mrs. McKenzie rose to her moment of glory like a film star portraying Jeanne d'Arc at the stake.

"I do!" she cried, disappearing in a puff of smoke with the formation of Romeos, waving a last farewell at her widower and his dog.

"Hardly fair," protested Mr. McKenzie to the doctor. "Didn't grasp consequences."

"Oh, yes, she did," corrected Dr. Leejan. "We are very careful about that. No, this woman has Given Up ALL For Love." He held his hat over his right side for two minutes. Mr. McKenzie ground his teeth.

"Well, let's go," the lost soul said finally. "Get it over."

When Mr. McKenzie came out of the puff of smoke and recovered his senses, he found himself in a veritable bower of magnolia bushes eight or nine feet high. Mr. McKenzie ran from bush to bush, and behind each were the lovers he could never glimpse or converse with.

"La-yuhdy, yoo-uh swee-yut uh-nuff too ee-yut, ah reckuhn," drooled a deep and profound drawl, dripping molasses. Then followed kissing sounds, girlish giggles, and a redhaired laugh.

"Oh, Buck! Oh, *honey!*" squealed Mrs. McKenzie, repeating the same endearments over and over, throughout eternity.

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Recommended Reading

by ANTHONY BOUCHER

SCIENCE FICTION HAS AT LAST DEFINITIVELY entered the mainstream of American culture: its existence has been recognized by THE $64,000 QUESTION.

On November 8, 1955, a contestant was asked to identify, for $16,000, the authors of the following five works (described as stories of imaginary better worlds, though this is not true of all): THE REPUBLIC, EREWHON, LOOKING BACKWARD, BRAVE NEW WORLD and UTOPIA.

I trust that any reader of this column can rattle off the answers as fast as he reads the titles. (If not, you won't find them on page such-and-such; go look them up . . . and read them.) The contestant, whose supposed specialty was Literature, went 0 for 5.

But at least imaginative fiction was recognized by Bergen Evans and his question-setters, if not by the contestant, as a significant ($16,000-worth) part of Literature.

Meanwhile, back at the space station . . .

It's bad enough when anthologists keep reprinting from each other; but it seems even more of an imposition on the reader — who would, presumably, like to assemble a representative library of science-fantasy with as little duplication as possible — when authors start reprinting from their own earlier collections.

Within a few weeks recently there appeared three books of short stories by four of the best writers in our field: Ray Bradbury, Theodore Sturgeon and the Kuttners. And each volume repeated material, not only from various anthologies, but from a previous book of stories by the same writer.

In Bradbury's case this was overt and justified. His first book, DARK CARNIVAL (Arkham, 1946), sold badly and is almost unknown to the thousands of readers who have discovered Bradbury only in recent years. THE OCTOBER COUNTRY (Ballantine, $3.50*; no paper edition) is to a large extent a revised edition of DARK CARNIVAL for this new public.

To these enthusiasts born out of due time, it's unhesitatingly recommended. It's a large book, of almost 100,000 words, containing 19 stories, 11 of them fantasies. The rest are macabre, guignol or otherwise odd versions of reality — not even nominal science fiction this time. All explore that October country

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that has always been one of Bradbury's richest soils — "that country," as he writes here, "where it is always turning late in the year. That country where the hills are fog and the rivers are mist; where noons go quickly, dusks and twilight linger, and midnights stay. That country composed in the main of cellars, subcellars, coal-bins, closets, attics, and pantries faced away from the sun. That country whose people are autumn people, thinking only autumn thoughts. Whose people passing at night on the empty walks sound like rain. . . ." And where, one might add, a writer can feel at home, untortured by the need to attack a science, a technology and a civilization which he is unwilling to understand.

The reader who knows only Bradbury's science fiction, even at its best in THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES, will find a whole new and wonderful world here. But it's hard to know just what to say to the old-line Bradbury devotee, who already owns DARK CARNIVAL — and probably knows most of it by heart.

Of the 19 stories, only 4 (not 5, as the jacket asserts) are new; none of these are, strictly, fantasies, and two of them are pretty sub-standard for Bradbury. (But don't miss *The Watchful Poker Chip of H. Matisse!*) The 15 stories from DARK CARNIVAL include much, but not all, of the best of that volume — and a little of the worst. A number of them have been extensively rewritten, often beneficially; but in some instances the original version seems better, and in others a story crying out for revision (notably *The Next in Line*, with its worthy overwriting) has been left virtually untouched.

I'll compromise and say that THE OCTOBER COUNTRY is an essential volume for any fantasy library (or for any collection of the modern short story) . . . without replacing its predecessor. If you can locate the now out of print Arkham original, by all means buy both books.

Theodore Sturgeon (I keep saying) is overdue to be Discovered by the literary pundits who at long last recognized Bradbury; but CAVIAR (Ballantine, $2*; paper, 35c) is not wholly satisfactory evidence to back his claim. Of course assembling a new Sturgeon book is something of a problem: he's had three previous solo collections, adding up to 37 stories, and at least as many more have been anthologized. Even allowing for considerable overlap, at least 50 Sturgeon stories must have been reprinted, naturally including most of his best. But I find it hard to believe that the barrel-scraping process has quite reached the point indicated by CAVIAR.

The one firstrate story here is a familiar one: the classic *Microcosmic God* from *Astounding*, 1941, reprinted in Wollheim's POCKET BOOK in 1943 and in Sturgeon's own WITHOUT SORCERY in 1949. The others, ranging in time from 1942 to a new unpublished (and non-fan-

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tasy) story, are, by Sturgeonian standards, an indifferent lot — consistently clever and even brilliant in their surface treatment but weak in essence, sometimes conventional, sometimes illogical, and most often exasperatingly tricksy, with "surprise" endings which are obvious from the start or which do not hold up on rereading.

I repeat, "by Sturgeonian standards." If you aren't expecting too much, you'll find 35c-worth of bright reading here. But you won't find that perfect fusion of imagination and insight, of light entertainment and serious fiction, that has marked the International Fantasy Award novel, MORE THAN HUMAN, the recent F&SF short novel, *The* [*Widget*], *the* [*Wadget*], *and Boff*, or most of Sturgeon's shorts and novelets.

The third of these collections, NO BOUNDARIES by Henry Kuttner and C. L. Moore (Ballantine, $2*; paper, 35c), rates high in quality — and about equally high in familiarity. The longest and best story, *Vintage Season*, is in Conklin's TREASURY (as by Lawrence O'Donnell); the fine demon-tale *The Devil We Know* is in Campbell's FROM UNKNOWN WORLDS (as by Kuttner solo); and *Exit the Professor* (one of the Hogben stories of hillbilly supermen) is in the authors' own A GNOME THERE WAS (as by Lewis Padgett). Since the new book contains only five stories (if long ones), that leaves two not previously reprinted: *Two-Handed Engine* (F&SF, August, 1955) and a not unrelated study in robotics and free will, *Home There's No Returning*. At least these several entries do represent the married collaborators at or near their best in a number of different veins; and since best Kuttner-Moore always rereads magnificently (indeed, often seems even better the second or third time), the book — in its cheaper format, at any rate — is a recommended investment.

The most enjoyable late-1955 arrival in longer science-fantasy (science fiction seems hardly the term for it) is Fredric Brown's MARTIANS, GO HOME (Dutton, $2.75*). Much expanded from its *Astounding* version (September, 1954), this prankish caper deserves to be the ultimate Invasion of Earth story. When the Martians finally arrive, in 1964, they turn out to be Little Green Men after all, and as pettily nasty a horde as you can imagine. Omnipresent hecklers of every human activity from the sperm to the worm, they manage to disrupt man's civilization completely until . . . And here Mr. Brown offers you three effective methods of destroying a Martian invasion, each more pleasingly improbable than the last. Granted, this is not another WHAT MAD UNIVERSE? (what could be?); but the cheerfully devastating games that it plays with logic, philosophy, science and sex add up to further demonstration of the the-

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sis, so ably upheld by Brown as novelist, short-story writer and anthologist, that SF Can Be Fun.

Reprints are headed by the hardcover reissue of a neglected 1939 novel, William Sloane's THE EDGE OF RUNNING WATER (Dodd, Mead, $3*).

Like Sloane's TO WALK THE NIGHT, this blends science fiction with mystery, suspense and terror — not quite so effectively as in that unforgettable book, but still with powerful impact. Characterization is strong; the smalltown Maine background comes alive; and the application of electronics to "psychic" research is ingeniously worked out, with a climactic scene of memorable grue.

Urgently recommended among paperback reprints: Isaac Asimov's detective story of the future, THE CAVES OF STEEL (Signet, 35c); L. Sprague de Camp's *Unknown* tale of time travel, LEST DARKNESS FALL (Galaxy, 35c; abridged by over a third); Aldous Huxley's BRAVE NEW WORLD (Bantam, 35c); Eric Frank Russell's SELECTIONS FROM DEEP SPACE (Bantam, 25c; containing 8 of the original 9 stories); and Groff Conklin's anthology INVADERS OF EARTH (Pocket Books, 25c; including 15 stories out of 22). It's good to note that the Conklin reprint, unlike the recent paper version of his THINKING MACHINES, preserves his excellent patterning and commentary.

I've consistently maintained that the annual "juvenile" novels of Robert A. Heinlein are far superior, in both writing and thinking, to most adult science fiction, and have even backed that judgment by publishing one of them here as an adult serial. But TUNNEL IN THE SKY (Scribner's, $2.50*) would not serve well to demonstrate my point. It's more loosely plotted and more sketchily characterized than any Heinlein, adult or juvenile, in a number of years. Disappointment, however, comes only when you measure it up against Heinlein, rather than his competitors for the teen-age market. The story idea's a good one: The pupils in a high school seminar on Advanced Survival are, as a final test, turned loose singly on an unexplored planet where they must Survive Or Else; a nova causes a space warp so that they are not picked up again on schedule, and the young people are forced to develop their own isolated civilization. The details are worked out with all the convincing care that one expects; and among an otherwise shadowy cast of characters, a splendid Zulu girl named Caroline Beatrice Mshiyeni emerges as possibly Heinlein's best woman to date.

Andre Norton is Heinlein's chief (and almost sole) competitor in the two-way, juvenile-adult novel; a number of her hardcover juveniles have been successfully reprinted as adult paperbacks. STAR GUARD (Harcourt, Brace, $3*) should do at least

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as well. Galactic Central Control has, by the year 3956, limited the war-like inhabitants of this planet to service as interstellar mercenary troops. On a remote world, a troop doublecrossed and almost destroyed by local politics fights its way to a realization that there may be another role for Earth to play in the galaxy. Miss Norton tells a sheer adventure story as well as anyone going; and this is one of her best.

Of the juveniles with no adult pretensions, most seem to be aimed at the youth who has read no previous science fiction — and I can't help wondering how many s.f. primers there may be a market for. Surely the boy who finds he has a taste for the marvels of space and time is going to plunge on into adult s.f. — just as you and I did directly, back when there were no special "teen-age level" books written exclusively for us. Only Donald A. Wollheim's THE SECRET OF THE MARTIAN MOONS (Winston, $2*) has much appeal for the teen-ager already acquainted with a few of science fiction's basic concepts and plots; and indeed Mr. Wollheim has brought together enough novel ideas and twists here to interest adults as well. Starting with a forced evacuation of our Martian colony, compelled by petty-minded Earth politicians, he goes on to reveal the surprising secret of the moons . . . and then to pile a few more surprises upon that — all in a rousing adventure, avowedly juvenile and admirable as such, but also lively enough to recall to an adult the excitement of his earliest s.f. reading.

Among the books for beginners, Slater Brown's SPACEWARD BOUND (Prentice-Hall, $2.75*) stands out as an attractive combination of entertainment and education. At appropriate moments, the narrative suspends for commendably accurate and concise lectures on the basic facts of probable spaceflight; and these are so well woven into the story as to avoid any possible reader-resentment at being so educated. The plot is simple but good (youths banding as "Young Astropolitans" to achieve spaceflight and found elsewhere a better world than their elders have shaped here), and there's a welcome vein of dry humor in the telling. In all, I'd guess that this is just the book with which to introduce a novice in junior high or high school to the elements of space fact and fiction.

* Books marked with an asterisk may be ordered through F&SF's Readers' Book Service. For details, see page 128.

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When the first Beaumont-Oliver collaboration appeared (The Last Word, *F&SF, April, 1955; reprinted in* THE BEST FROM F&SF: FIFTH SERIES), *I described it as "a special service to scholars of the future: a succinct presentation of every theme and situation characteristic of routine conventional s.f." But the word "every" was rash; even so perceptive a pastiche did not quite manage to include* every *cliché. Indeed, when the authors thought it over, it was obvious that further adventures must await Claude Adams in Space and Time, where (as Wordsworth almost prophesied) the old Trite Ones grow their fee-fed corn.*

I, Claude

by CHARLES BEAUMONT
AND CHAD OLIVER

"AND STILL THEY COME," Claude Adams mused, with mixed pride and regret. "Where will it all end?"

He stood on the highest balcony of his palace tower, his lined face somewhat damp from cloud moisture, and peered down through his telescope at the seething beehive that was Earth. The view might well have turned a lesser man giddy.

Far below him, the silent conveyor belts were delivering another batch of babies from the undersea incubation stations. The vast city of Ñyawck, a symphony in steel and glass, sprawled across the entire continent. Beyond it were the fabulous ice cities of the frozen North, the oasis cities of the deserts, the fairyland cities of the mountains, and the submarine cities beneath the restless oceans.

The lower levels of the atmosphere were choked with gnatlike copters and hordes of crimson-lipped juvenile delinquents in hopped-up Hell-scooters. Mutants swam lazily through the air with telekinetic breast strokes. Even as Claude watched, a mobile skybilly city floated over him, bound for what adventures heaven alone knew.

Claude sighed and summoned a piggyback robot.

"Step lively, Asenion," he said to the clanking creature. "I wish to be taken to my lower chambers."

Asenion muttered something about being warmed by the same winds,

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hurt by the same hurts, and fed by the same blood — which was not strictly true — but he hoisted Claude dutifully to his back and carried him to his destination via an elevator robot.

Secure in his magnificent office, Claude glanced admiringly at the many statues of himself set into niches in the golden walls. There were those who felt that the togas were a trifle anachronistic, but Claude could not agree.

"A god is a god," he remarked with calm logic; besides, he had always felt a certain obligation toward classic simplicity.

He pressed a button and an air-conditioning robot opened the window which looked out upon the lower balcony.

Instantly, Claude heard the ominous murmurings of the crowd.

He shrugged, expecting the worst. Filling his old briar with shag tobacco, he lit it with a wooden kitchen match, which had been filched for him by a loyal culinary robot. He blew an idle smoke ring at the Sacred Time Machine in the alcove, missing it by several feet.

Some years ago, of course, there had been that ugly Poets Uprising, which had forced him to ban all fantasy and poetry from his empire. And now, more crowd murmurs.

"Uneasy lies the head," he observed, "that wears the crown."

At that very moment, the door burst open and a bloody courier dashed into the chamber and collapsed at Claude's feet.

Claude eyed the man with considerable distaste.

"You may rise," he said, prodding him with his boot. "You know I find the sight of blood repulsive. Why did you not bathe?"

"There was no time, sir," the courier gasped. "It is the Hour of the Disaster!"

"Calm yourself, my good fellow. Which disaster do you have in mind?"

"The Muties," the man panted, "are revolting."

Claude frowned. "See here," he said, "I'll brook no prejudice from my —"

"No, no, Your Gentleness! I mean the Muties are in revolt. They propose to take over the Seat of Government!"

"Ummm. It was, I suppose, inevitable."

"That's not all, Your Gentleness. The super robots —"

Claude sighed. "The Computies too, eh?"

"And even the Normies. They march right now on the palace!"

Claude stood up languidly and adjusted his toga. "One does not quibble with Destiny," he said. "Adventures happen to the adventurous. You may go."

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The courier left and a rug robot was summoned to sponge up the blood.

Claude did not hesitate. He carefully gathered up four large cans of tobacco, a seltzer bottle, and a trick knife, secreting them in the commodious folds of his garment. As he was cleaning his pipe, the secret palace panel slid open and Son flew into the room. Claude looked into his first-born's strange eyes.

"*Et tu*, Son?"

"I've come from the Mutie Council to warn you, Dad," Son said, his voice giving no hint of the struggle raging within him. "You have fifteen minutes. After that, I am your enemy."

"Your filial loyalty touches me deeply," Claude said. "Please leave at once."

Son saluted him and flew back through the secret panel.

The murmurs of the masses in the plaza below were interfering with his concentration. Claude smiled icily and stepped out upon the balcony. An old woman was sitting on the railing, knitting.

"Ah, Madame Defargo," Claude nodded. "Good evening."

The murmur of the crowd swelled to a telepathic roar of thought:

```
D                    IT'S TIME FOR A CHANGE!
O                      U   e   a
W                      R   p   n
No                     N   t   g
 Without          Taxation T e   C
WITH CLAUDE WE SINK!     H s   l
  T   N     R      E     e a   a
   H  D     R        R   n u   u
    C E     A        A   t d   d
    L R     N        S   a   eND OPPRESSION
     A   THE YOLK    C   t
      U      o  o    A   i
      D      u  u    L   o
       E         s        On with freedom
                 e        U
                 !        T
```

Imperially, Claude raised one hand, palm outward.

The crowd hushed, as with one voice.

"So," Claude said without emotion, "your Esper Muties would rule the world, yet they cannot spell tyranny." His voice carried to the limits of the realm. A pin dropped. "You have conspired against the Father of

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Your Country. I say this unto you: grass will grow in the streets and blood shall flow from your water faucets."

Claude turned on his heel and stepped back inside. He inserted himself into the secret chute and slid down to the underworld spaceport.

A mighty ship, first of her kind, quivered in readiness.

Claude rapped smartly on the airlock, which was instantly opened by a man in the trim purple-and-green of the Space Patrol.

"Carry on, Mr. Christian," Claude said as the patrolman saluted. "I wish to peek into the cargo hold before we blast."

"Aye, sir." Mr. Christian clicked his heels together.

Claude rode an escalator through the twisting corridors, down into the very bowels of the space leviathan *Santa Maria*. He marched across the cavernous cargo hold and jerked open the door of a supply closet.

"Brrrkl?"

"Just as I suspected," Claude stated. "A stowaway. Eve, my dearest wife, your intentions are no doubt of the finest, but I never permit myself the luxury of making the same error twice."

"Brrrkl?"

"No, Eve. You are old, and oil no longer works its magic transformation. Let us endeavor to leave the past the past, the present the present, and the future the future."

"Brrrkl." The once-lovely android sighed, seeing the irrefutability of her husband's logic.

Claude summoned a squad of Space Marines.

"Set her ashore," he snapped, his voice unusually harsh to cover the tremor that was spilling through him. "See that she is not harmed."

They carried Eve away. A trace of weariness in his step, Claude mounted to the control room.

"Look alive there, Christian!" he said, his slim fingers dancing over the banks of instruments and flashing lights. "Prepare to blast."

"Check."

"*Button blast!*"

"*CHECK!*"

With a roar that shook the planet, the mighty spaceship rose to greet the stars.

Claude sat at a small cocktail table in the control room, enjoying a beverage. He accomplished this feat, despite the weightlessness of free fall, by means of a strategically placed magnet in the seat of his toga, together with an adroit manipulation of a bottle of scotch and the seltzer bottle.

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"Damnably lonely out here," he mused, gazing out a porthole. "The stars are like frozen soap bubbles. . . ."

The first mate sailed into the room.

"I run a ship by the book," Claude informed him, squirting a dash of seltzer down his throat. "Where are we?"

The mate flushed and examined his report pad. "I don't know, sir," he said evasively.

"Never mind." Claude crossed his legs. "How are the men taking it?"

"Well, sir," the mate said apologetically, running a space-bronzed hand through his crew-cut hair, "we have four new cases of space madness, two new mutations due to cosmic ray bombardment, and a meteor hit Phipps."

"Ummm," said Claude.

The mate saluted and propelled himself from the control room. Claude turned his attention once more to the porthole.

"A lot of miles," he thought distantly.

Then, suddenly, with a jolt that almost caught him unawares, the spaceship began to jerk like a wild stallion.

"Damned meteors," Claude complained. "Vermin of space."

He shut off his magnet, lifted himself from his chair, and floated over to the control board. A good many lights were blinking, most of them red, and relays were *thunking* into place with monotonous regularity. Somewhere, alarm bells were ringing.

Claude's cunning fingers played across the control banks.

Delicately, he began to bring the great ship around, standing her on her tail to make a right-angle blastaway.

It was then that he sensed he was not alone. He turned, eyebrows slightly lifted.

Mr. Christian slouched in the doorway, a marlinespike in his grizzled fist. Behind him floated the mate and most of the crew.

"Where," asked Claude with interest, "did you get that marlinespike?"

Christian smiled, inscrutably. "That," he grinned, "would be telling."

The mate advanced into the room.

"I'm taking the wheel, Captain," he said, "under Article 184 of Patrol Regulations."

"There is no wheel," Claude informed him, crisply.

Abashed, the mate fell back into the corridor. Christian, however, was made of sterner stuff.

"You're drunk, Captain," he said. "I'm taking over, or none of us will get out of this meteor-shower alive."

Stung, Claude slapped him in the face with the palm of his hand. "I have had a few drinks, yes," he said. "That is all."

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"Nevertheless," Christian said, "I am taking command."

Claude shrugged. "This," he stated calmly, "is mutiny. I trust you understand that?"

Christian laughed, and took over.

Ten hours later, what was left of the *Santa Maria* was safe and becalmed, somewhere between Venus and Mercury.

"You have your choice, sir," the mate told him. "As stipulated in Article 185 of Patrol Regulations, you may either assume your post as second-in-command or be ejected into the void in a spacesuit."

Claude did not hesitate. "I choose Space," he said.

"Zip him into his suit," Christian commanded.

"You don't mind," Claude suggested slyly, "if I take my seltzer bottle along with me, do you?"

Christian made a disgusted noise with his lips. "Tosspot to the end, eh, ex-Captain?" he said; then: "Permission granted."

Claude smiled his secret smile as they bolted the helmet over his head. He marched with a steady step to the escalator and rode to the airlock. He stepped inside.

The massive port locked behind him. The other port hissed open.

He gripped his seltzer bottle, and went Outside.

Space!

Revolving slowly in that immense and lonely land where there is no up, and no down, and hardly any sideways, Claude watched the *Santa Maria* vanish like a needle sliding through thick black velvet, and thought, "Well, old fellow, here you are, alone."

Alone in space.

He tapped the handle of the seltzer bottle. A stream of silvery spray issued from the spout, and he careened in an *entrechat* of singular grace and velocity.

"Nijinsky be damned," he chuckled, pleased that the seltzer-water's prolonged proximity to ice-cubes had prevented it from freezing in the sub-arctic cold of outer space.

Then the chuckle died in his throat, and was reincarnated as a sigh.

"Well," he murmured, looking about him at the vast unswirling emptiness. "Well."

Claude was a practical man, ungiven to excesses of imagination, yet, now, drifting in the limitless void, far from home and the sound of human laughter, he was assailed by a sudden melancholy. The stars, he mused, are a little like birthday candles and a little like eyes and a little like diamonds. It is all a gigantic, unending Sea of Lights. Why, just look at Earth, there;

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poor, mixed-up, shoot-'em-up and gone-to-hell Earth, old Earth . . .

Fretwork and foolery, of course: cheap poesy, and nothing more. Yet — he looked over his shoulder at the red majesty of Mars, then, slightly to the left, at Venus — yet, it is true. Space cuts a man down to size.

Claude felt a tug at his feet. He glanced in the direction he assumed to be down. He stared and blinked.

It was the Sun.

He was falling into the Sun.

"Had I a refrigerator," he thought, as the warmth increased, "and a cup, I could gather some of the precious liquid which once was the beginning of all life. But, of course, being alone, one man against the stars, that would be a fool's errand."

The eternal night turned swiftly into eternal day. Quick to seize upon any advantage, Claude brushed away his uncharacteristic imaginings and drew from his suit a copy of Shoogly's *Guide to Emergency Space Navigation.* It told him all he needed to know, at a glance.

He replaced the scorched volume, held his breath against the bitter fumes of burning rubber, calculated distance, ratio, and rate of descent, and pressed the handle of the seltzer bottle.

He shot off sharply at 48°.

Like a phoenix trailing a placenta of silver fire, he zoomed high across the surface of the Sun, a minuscule and yet somehow noble speck of brightness in the everlasting corridors of Space.

Once around the Sun, he breathed contentedly.

Shoogly, as usual, had been right. He had mentioned the mysterious planet Vulcan, which had first been postulated by a famous German astronomer in that long out-of-print volume, *Die Lichte in dem Himmel sind Sterne;* the curious planet moved about behind the Sun, as though balanced upon a counterpoise with Earth.

And there it was, like a blue basketball in Infinity.

Claude decided that it would be pleasant to land upon Vulcan. Anyhow, he was virtually out of seltzer-water.

Judiciously, he brought the seltzer into play in tiny squirts and jets, braking himself. He employed the last jigger in a final, precisely calculated maneuver that landed him upright.

"And that," he announced to the silence and the sunshine of an alien world, "is that."

Claude stood in what seemed to be a desolate sea bottom, surrounded by the grotesque lacings of petrified seaweed.

"The air," he stated categorically, "will be breathable."

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He unscrewed his helmet, found the air to his liking, and unzipped his spacesuit.

In no time at all he heard the scream.

The scream of a female.

He extracted his trick knife from his toga, pressed a stud in its handle, and produced a long rapier of the finest Toledo steel. He sauntered into a clump of trees and grasses, from which the scream had come, his weapon at the ready.

What he saw forced his jaws together with a sudden snap.

There, in the center of a clearing, was a breathtakingly beautiful girl, tied to a stake which rose from a pile of dry brush. Around her was a group of creatures of such singular hideousness that Claude blinked. They seemed to fit no category. They had flesh the whiteness of rain-washed gravestones, flowing yellow wigs which encircled their bald pates, indescribably gorgeous diadems set in circlets of silver about their heads, and ten legs each. As they danced — Claude assumed it was a dance — their tongues lolled out of their mouths like so many crimson banners in a squall.

It was not a pretty thing to watch.

He took a giant step forward. It carried him up and over the heads of the aliens, and he thought, as he spiraled, "Good lord, of course! It's the difference in gravity."

When he had regained his footing, he perceived that the creatures were now standing in a semi-circle, facing him.

He transferred the rapier to his left hand and advanced. "Ugly devils," he breathed, only partially comforted by the anthropological truism that he, being new to their experience, was doubtless equally repugnant to them.

"Kaor!" he said.

The creatures stared without expression from their multiple tiny eyes.

Claude smiled. Perhaps they were playing possum.

"You speak English?" he asked.

"Not well," one of the creatures said in a voice at once commanding and sinister, "but adequately for the purpose. Who are you, Man-With-Two-Legs-Only-Who-Comes-From-The-Stars? And why are you here?"

Claude was in no mood for questions and answers.

"Although not unduly fond of melodrama," he stated, "I confess that I find myself unalterably opposed to the wanton slaughter of attractive females, particularly those who are, for the moment, *en déshabille*."

"Here on the planet Sarboom, which you call Vulcan," the deciped retorted, "we have certain customs. Sacrifice is one of them. I, Karskarkas, say this to you: Earthman, go home!"

"Dear fellow," Claude smiled, "that is quite impossible."

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Karskarkas pounded his chest. "Defend yourself," he called, drawing a long sword and an atom pistol from alternate portions of his battle harness. "What is your weapon?"

"The blade," Claude said without hesitation.

"Have at you then, Terrestrian! Know you not that you face the greatest swordsman in all of Sarboom?"

"Tosh," admonished Claude, springing into the fray with some interest but little enthusiasm. He had never fancied himself as a fighting man, but one could hardly permit oneself to be humbled before aborigines.

Steel met steel.

Parry, thrust, *riposte!*

Stalemate.

Claude gazed into the seven red-rimmed eyes of Karskarkas, only inches away.

"Where have we met before?" the savage asked, panting.

"Heidelberg," Claude suggested with a straight face.

"Never heard of it."

Then, with a lightning reverse spin, Claude slipped his blade beneath the fellow's harness and spitted him as one would a pig.

"Touché," he announced.

He sliced the ropes which bound the girl with two deft strokes of his dripping rapier.

"I am Woola, of noble birth," the lovely girl whispered, kissing his feet. "I am yours."

"Garbage," Claude said, and paid her no further mind.

The tribesmen were muttering angrily now, and he knew that it was time to depart. He backed in mighty bounds toward a dark wood.

Surprisingly, the creatures did not attempt to hinder him. Instead, they laughed, clapping one another about the shoulders.

"Odd," Claude mused.

"The Forest of Darkness!" the beautiful Woola cried, her voice faint with horror. "Oh, my lord, do not venture there as you value your life! It is the abode of monsters!"

"Superstitious devils," Claude chuckled.

He strolled on into the lowering shadows of the Forest of Darkness. . . .

There was the smell of pine needles and centuries and silence. Claude sniffed with distaste and slashed his way through the underbrush, pausing only to disengage his toga from a bramble.

Then he stopped.

Phantom shapes just outside his field of vision seemed to flee and gibber,

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and the moldy floor grew murmurous. Occasionally, there was a deep sigh.

"Pfah," he commented, clenching his teeth about the stem of the aged briar. "A forest is a forest. Well enough for silly women to be frightened — it is, indeed, part of their charm — but the foofaraw of ignorant primitives is insufficient motive for —"

The sighing gave way to a hum of voices. Angry voices, weird voices, sad voices.

Claude raised his rapier and listened.

He caught snippets of conversation from the darkness ahead:

"*Once upon a midnight dreary, as I . . .*" ". . . . *slicket, timorous beastie . . .*" ". . . *prepare for collision course . . .*" "*tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow . . .*"

Claude went forward, keeping to the wet patches of forest floor, so that he would make no sound. The voices rose in volume and he could see the glow of firelight, pirouetting skywards, turning the sere branches into disagreeable shapes.

". . . *I is gone fotch Pogo for the big perlieu Miz Boombah is holdin' for all the little tads. . . .*"

Cautiously, Claude pulled a clump of foliage open.

A sight greeted his eyes which caused his knuckles to whiten and his forehead to pleat. He got a deathgrip on his briar.

Huddled about an immense bonfire was a fantastic group of beings, some human, some otherwise. One rather stocky young man, with thick glasses and an animated manner, was dressed entirely in shades of brown, and upon his head was a cap of the finest Irish linen. This enthusiastic, wonderfully intense gentleman was squatted before an alligator, an opossum, and a mouse, and these animals — whose sizes seemed to be askew — were listening in respectful silence to a faintly cadenced lecture. Claude edged closer, and managed to hear something about Illinois porches and old people like dried apricots and illustrated men and ah! lime ice cream, but it was all very vague.

A rabbit hurried in circles, consulting a large watch.

Realization bloomed within Claude's mind. The pieces of this strange jigsaw puzzle began to fit together.

"Of course," Claude murmured, stepping aside to avoid collision with seven dwarfs, "I should have guessed."

He strode into the clearing.

The creatures paid him no heed, but went on talking, talking. They seemed somewhat shadowy, but he recognized most of them. Had they not spurred the Poets Uprising on Earth years before, with their pernicious psychoses?

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There was Captain Nemo, at a makeshift organ of bamboo reeds and sea-lion tusks, sitting in a tiny submarine; and the Wizard of Oz, astride the Hungry Tiger, followed by H. M. Wogglebug, T. E.; yes, and over there Mr. Poe consulting a travel guide to Venice; Mole, sniffing the spring air, River Rat, and Toad, tinkering with his new Jaguar; Beowulf in full armor swimming after a tired Grendel; and was that not bearded Professor Challenger there, shaking his fist at the imperturbable Mr. Sherlock Holmes?

A tall, shy, broad-shouldered man with glasses said very softly, "This is the race that will rule the Sevagram."

A klatsch of leprechauns worried the towering creation of the unhappy Frankenstein, whose tremblous hands reached for a sunlight and an understanding that were not forthcoming.

Count Dracula swept by, sipping red fluid through a straw.

Giants and brownies and trolls and kobolds and witches, gnomes, fairies on unicorns, elves playing hopscotch; werewolves and ghosts and poltergeists and doppelgängers hard at chess . . .

Claude frowned. He knew them all.

Writers and their creations, here.

He approached a lean, lantern-jawed figure who was consuming a plate of ice cream.

"I say —"

Mr. Lovecraft smiled oddly. "It is true," he said to Claude, "that I put a bullet through the head of my best friend, on that indescribably unforgettable night, owing to an encounter with an age-old monster, part squamous, part rugose, an ichorous pulp of . . ."

Claude moved on quickly. He came upon a sad man, dressed all in black, who was fingering a bodkin speculatively.

"To be or not to be," the unhappy prince said. "That is the question."

"My advice," Claude tossed over his shoulder, "not to be."

He selected a reasonably sane-looking man, a Virginian if he did not miss his guess, resting among sleeping silks and furs.

"I would like to know—" Claude began.

John Carter flexed a noble biceps. "I feel strangely at home here," he murmured, "far though I am from the River Iss and the Dying Sands of Mars, by the Valley Kor, near the . . ."

Claude rushed on, past Mr. Verne and Robin Hood and the brothers Grimm, and he noticed that they all held books in their hands. He passed a crystal pool in which swam what can only be advertised as Sturgeon.

On past the headless horseman, Merlin, Tarzan, and Donald Duck.

At the bonfire, he turned and faced the enemy.

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"Coxcombs," he muttered, "with their head-in-the-clouds nonsense! I prefer realism in my literature, a social message, a burning indictment of the merchant class — something a man can get his teeth into."

They ignored him, filling the air with their voices.

Claude snatched a book from the grasp of a scarecrow, riffled its pages, and then disdainfully flung the book into the fire.

It went up in smoke.

One author and three characters promptly disappeared.

"You mustn't," Dorothy, the little girl from Kansas, said, "really and truly you mustn't. These are the last remaining copies of the books. When they're gone, we will live no longer!"

"A tragic loss," Claude commented, tossing *The Wizard of Oz* into the crackling flames. Dorothy vanished.

He warmed to the sport, knowing that they were all too weak to offer serious resistance. Book followed book into the fire. Being after being vanished.

Soon the clearing was empty.

The fire died away.

"Good riddance," Claude said, not cruelly, but with the inflection of a man who has seen to an unpleasant but necessary chore.

He adjusted his toga and moved on.

A thousand smiling faces and many flambeaus greeted him not fifty yards distant. Karskarkas, his wound healed as though by magic, the threat gone from his saturnine visage, stepped forward from the crowd.

Claude lifted his rapier.

"Nay, Man-With-Two-Legs-Only-Who-Comes-From-The-Stars," Karskarkas smiled. "You have vanquished the monsters who have endangered our homes and our country for many years. You have made of the Forest of Darkness a pleasant wood where children may play. Alone, you have done the impossible."

"Balderdash," shrugged Claude.

Karskarkas stepped closer and held out his sword and atom pistol.

"Take these," he said, and, when Claude had done so: "Now, all hail our Chief, our Warlord!"

A mighty cheer rent the air.

The girl, Woola, crept up and touched his toga. "You are our master," she said softly, "and you may do with us as you will."

Then she lowered her eyes. She was still naked.

Claude sighed. "I accept your nomination. If at times I seem a heartless man, merciless, made of stone, then you must understand that I am a Warlord first, and a human second. The system is what counts." He glanced

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meaningfully at Woola and permitted himself to be hoisted to the shoulders of Karskarkas.

They marched then across seven dead sea bottoms to the palace of colored stones, singing an ancient, time-lost chanty.

Claude slept.

The long Vulcanian years drifted away like mist before a summer sun, and Claude began to find his life as Warlord singularly devoid of interest. One could rescue only a relatively small number of nubile maidens, he felt, engage in only a very few gladiatorial combats, without losing one's enthusiasm.

Even Woola, for all the ancient cunning of her race, grew tiresome.

When he chanced to notice, as he glanced into the sun-bending telescope of the Royal Sarboomian Observatory, the unmistakable mushrooms of atomic holocaust blooming like ugly weeds upon Earth, he did not hesitate.

"Earth has been fired upon," he announced to all, "and I must go."

Woola tried very hard not to cry — for she was a Princess of Sarboom, and princesses do not weep.

Space travel, in the absence of spaceships, was not easy.

"Where there is a will," Claude said, "there is a way."

He first had his warriors construct a space station out of petrified balsa wood. This was fired into an orbit around Vulcan by lashing thirty thousand atom pistols to its floor, and triggering them simultaneously by means of Instantaneous Ignition.

A new star rose in the east. Perhaps it would be a force for peace, perhaps for war. Who knew?

Building a spaceship taxed Claude's resources considerably. He finally had to settle for a vehicle blown out of thick glass by the Royal Sarboomian Glassblowers. Once he had shown them the principles upon which his seltzer bottle operated, their agile minds soon provided the necessary motive power.

Claude doffed his Warlord harness and put on the toga.

"Goodbye, and good luck," he said to a world no longer alien.

He squeezed the control handle and silver fluid jetted from the nozzle of his glass vessel. The ship flashed into the heavens.

He refueled at the doughnut-like space station, and leveled his prow at Earth. The silence of space shrieked at him from Beyond.

Perhaps it was a touch of sentiment, or perhaps it was only the momentary forgetfulness that comes with advancing age. Even Claude was not sure. In any event, he did not search the storage compartment.

He had a feeling that he was not alone.

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Earth was a devastated ruin.

A fitful breeze pushed grains of sand through the piles of junk that had once housed a mighty civilization.

"Destroyed by their own hand," Claude said. "I knew they could never get along without me."

He was, beyond a doubt, The Last Man in the World.

With the easy movements of a man going through a long-familiar routine, he went back to his silent spaceship and opened the door to the storage compartment.

"Come on out, Woola," he said wearily.

She hung her lovely head. "I stowed away," she whispered. "I could not bear to live without you—"

"Never mind," Claude said, taking her hand. He thought of other years, and other stowaways, and he felt old, old.

The wind sighed in the dunes.

"Your name," Claude demanded suddenly, a grim suspicion dawning in him. "What does it mean in your native language?"

She blushed, prettily. "My people have a legend," she said. "A story of Woo and Woola, who lived in a Garden at the very beginning of Time . . ."

"Say no more," Claude said, holding up his hand. "I pray you, say no more."

He looked at the barren world around him, remembering its green grasses and the beat of its sea. He did not doubt himself, but he was no longer young.

"Still," he said, "it is my destiny. Or so it seems."

Woola smiled, bravely.

Claude took her arm, with the courtly chivalry of days gone by, and together they wandered eastward, into the sunrise.

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Stories by Rachel Maddux have appeared in Collier's, Harper's *and* Story, *but never before in a fantasy magazine. She can, with luck, write a short story in a day — and has been working on a four-volume novel for 18 years. Her great good fortune, she says, is that she is "married to a man who understands writers": but the good fortune must be partly his as well, since his wife is a writer who understands marriage — as she demonstrates simply and touchingly in this peculiarly contemporary ghost story of a revenant who could return only in the 1950's.*

Final Clearance

by RACHEL MADDUX

"Hello. Oh, Evvie? Nice of you to call. Oh, I was just trying to get some of these sympathy notes acknowledged. You and Ed have been swell, but honestly, you don't need to worry about me. As a matter of fact, I'm going to turn in very soon. Yes, I have my sleeping pill and my glass of brandy and my book all laid out beside the bed. I'll call you tomorrow, Evvie.

"The notes? Well, I don't see how you could help, really. It isn't anything anyone else can do for you very well. Evvie, you'd be amazed. Do you know there are at least a dozen from people I never even heard of? There's one (I must show it to you) so very touching, in the most labored handwriting, from a man who owns a fruit store where Tom used to stop on his way home. Tom never even mentioned him and this Tony what's-his-name must have poured out all his troubles. . . .

"What? Yes, he was. The most wonderful. I can see him so clearly standing there chewing on an apple, giving this little man that vague smile he had and nodding his . . . nodding . . . Evvie, I'm slopping over again. Sorry. Call you in the morning."

Madeline replaced the receiver carefully and pressed the back of her hand against her lips. This treacherous blubbering that sneaked upon her without warning served no purpose. It neither assuaged grief nor eased bitterness; it did nothing but choke up her mouth and bring on another spell of vomiting.

"I won't have it," she said aloud. She reached for a cigarette and

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finally got the match flame aligned with the end of it. Every handkerchief she owned was a small hard ball lying in the laundry hamper. Even all of Tom's were used up now. The thing was she had to wash tomorrow, absolutely. She got up from the desk and walked into the bathroom. Even the kleenex was gone. This very afternoon she'd been in a drugstore and hadn't remembered. She blew her nose on a piece of toilet paper and missed the wastebasket when she tried to throw the paper into it. With a grotesque kind of patience she bent over slowly to pick up the toilet paper, holding on to the wash basin against her dizziness. When the phone rang again she straightened up slowly and limited herself to a deep sigh. Against the ringing she told herself to remember that somewhere she had left a cigarette burning.

"Hello? Hello? Oh, yes, Uncle George. Why, I'm all right. How are you?"

The cigarette, she saw, was safely here in the ash tray on the desk and she reached for it gratefully.

"That's very kind of you and Aunt Emily, but really I'd rather be here. I'm just more comfortable in my own place, you know. Oh *no*. Don't come. I mean, I wouldn't think of it. No, please. Why, you'd have to get the car out and everything and it's so late. Really, I'm all right. I'm fine. Certainly. I'm keeping busy, as you suggested."

That emergency frustrated, Madeline leaned back in her chair and discovered that, at a certain angle, it would produce a squeak. Now, by moving forward and back only a little, she could punctuate Uncle George's endless talk with little squeaks.

"Yes, I know you did, Uncle George (*squeak, squeak*). Tom was so fond of you both (*squeak*). Oh, you did? That's very kind of you. I'm so stupid about things like insurance (*squeak, squeak*). I know Tom would appreciate . . ."

She sat through two more cigarettes saying yes, saying no, saying thank you and squeaking the chair. It sounded exactly like a pig and for a while she played with the picture of having turned the phone over to a small, white pig. She could see Uncle George talking pompously on and on, Aunt Emily hovering nearby, while at the other end of the line the neat, white pig squeaked back appropriate responses.

Even this came to an end at last and now she sat at the desk too worn out to tackle the notes of sympathy. The big thing was, did it really matter if she washed her teeth or not? If she just fell on the bed, for once, and didn't carry on, what would happen?

"What?" Tom had said after the Anderson's party. "You mean your pores aren't cleansed? You're going to leave them clogged up all night, choking, like it says in the ads?"

Suddenly a picture of her proper little mother came into Madeline's

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mind and filled her with such warmth and affection that she actually smiled. Relatives had swarmed over the house after her father's death so that her mother, in order to escape them for a moment, had walked into the bathroom while she was lying in a hot tub. Her mother had closed the door firmly and, with a sigh, had let her very proper widowhood slip from her. "If cousin Norma asks me one more time what I'm going *to do now*, I'll spit in her eye," she said. The two of them had started giggling there in that house of death. Madeline had crawled out of the tub and put her arms around her little mother while they tried to stop the sound of their giggling lest they shock one of the relatives. She had started to shiver and they had seen then that her mother was all wet from the bath water.

Cutting as it did through so many years and such a distance the phone's ring frightened her so that she knocked her elbow against the edge of the desk and, cradling the sharp pain of it, she let the phone ring twice again before she could answer. But that fright had been as nothing to the fear which, at the sound of the voice on the telephone, had her at once on her feet. She was electrified with fear and she put out one hand to hold onto the desk while, with the other, she carefully moved the receiver away from her ear and laid it upside down on the desk. Her knees simply fell away from her and she sank into the chair staring with horror at the receiver which went on calling her name: "Madeline, darling, are you there? Muffin, are you all right? Look, it's Tom. I was afraid to walk in on you without warning. Muffin, Muffin, please say something. . . ."

The first shock over, she quickly found a furious strength to pick up the receiver. "What kind of horrible joke is this?" she said. "Who would do such a thing? What kind of person? Who is it? I said. Tell me who it is."

The voice became quieter suddenly, almost a murmur, and Madeline closed her eyes and succumbed to it. Slowly the tears slid down her cheeks and at last she held the phone against her breast and bent over it in caress until it gave a clicking sound and then the dial tone began like some huge insect caught against a windowpane.

It would stop of course if she replaced it on the cradle and, what's more, her mouth was open and she was aware of it. That was a good sign if she was aware of it, surely? After all, it was perhaps a very common thing. Anybody might have such an experience in a state of shock. Perfectly understandable. Funny, she couldn't remember the doctor's number. Well, was that a crime?

She began to thumb through the pages of the address book. There it was. Now she must dial it carefully. Might as well get it right the first time. While she listened to the

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ringing, she tried to think what time it was and whether she couldn't wait until morning.

"Hello, hello," she said. "Is this the exchange? I'm trying to reach Doctor Morse. Sorry to disturb him but . . . but it's rather an emergency. What? Out? How long? Oh, I suppose so. Thirty minutes? All right. Yes, I'll give you the number."

It was printed right there before her. All she had to do was read it off.

But the footsteps. They couldn't be anyone else's. They couldn't.

She put down the phone and walked out of the room and down the hall and all the time she kept thinking: I'm not frightened at all, isn't that strange? And then, tentatively, as she heard the door open, she called, "Tom? Tom, is that you?"

At last he held her away from him and looked at her. "God, darling," he said, "you look awful. Did you really have a wretched time of it?"

"Well, naturally," she said. "What did you expect?"

"I don't know," he said. "I've been so busy filling out the questionnaires I guess I haven't thought."

"Questionnaires?"

"Yes. That reminds me, Muffin. What county was your mother born in?"

"Pasquotink. Why?"

"I couldn't remember, he said. "I've been beating my brains out trying to remember. How do you spell it?"

"Tom, stop. Wait a minute. What difference does it make how you spell Pasquotink?"

"Of course. You don't understand, do you, Muffin? Poor baby. Let's sit down. I've got quite a lot to explain."

It tore her heart the way he looked, as though somehow he had done something naughty, and she went to him and put her hand on his shoulder. "Darling," she said, "I . . . I don't mean to be indelicate or anything, but do the . . . I mean, can you still drink coffee . . . and all that?"

"Sure," he said. "You make some, huh?"

While she was in the kitchen she could hear him walking around the living room.

"Any fruit in the house?" he called out to her.

"On the coffee table," she said. "Your Uncle George sent it."

"How is the reactionary old bastard? Giving you a bad time?"

She saw him reach for an apple and bite into it with great relish. This is silly, she thought. The dead don't eat apples.

"Your uncle is driving me mad," she said. "That insufferable bore calls me every morning and every night. He's disturbed about my being bitter."

"Are you bitter, Muffin?"

"Oh, well, at first, you know. I guess I got pretty hysterical. He kept telling me about all the young men who had died of heart attacks

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and I blew a fuse and said you hadn't di —"

"Died, darling. You're not being indelicate. It's all right. You said I hadn't died of a heart attack. Yes?"

"I said you had been worried and tormented to death by their goddamned security system and . . . I don't know. I probably was going to blow up the State Department with a bomb, or something. I don't know what I said."

"Anyhow, it bothered Uncle George, I see. It's his government and the worst his government could be responsible for is an unfortunate misunderstanding, if it takes every last nephew he's got."

"You *are* the last nephew. He keeps telling me you're all *he* had."

"The water's boiling over, Muffin."

When she came back with the coffee and the cups on a tray, Tom was standing by the pile of sympathy notes.

"What's all this?" he said.

"Just letters, darling. You know. From people."

"About me?" He sat down and began to go through them in the most natural way. "Well, what do you know?" he said. "Old Tony."

"I haven't answered it yet. It's so touching. How does it happen you never mentioned him, Tom?"

"Tony? Didn't I ever tell you about Tony?"

"Tom, listen. I don't know if you ever told me about Tony or not. That's not what I want to hear about."

"Of course, Muffin. I'm sorry. It's just that I'm used to it already, you know, and . . . I keep forgetting."

"Tom," she said, "*please help me.*"

Instantly he was beside her, holding her, stroking her hair.

"This doesn't happen to other people, does it, Tom? Why *us?*"

"It's because of the delay, Muffin."

"The delay?"

"The delay in my clearance. You know how poor my memory is. I couldn't remember where your mother was born and —"

"Tom, are you telling me you have to be cleared for *death?*"

"Sure, Muffin. Look, let's sit down, huh? It's not really so hard to accept. Don't you remember when I was trying to get clearance before and every time I'd go to a new place to get a job we'd be so surprised that we had it to do all over again?"

"Yes, and I'd say, just the way I'm going to say right now: *but surely not here, too?*"

"That's right. We were always surprised. Well, it's just another step, you know. Just an extension of the same thing."

"Everything that comes in my mind to say, I've said before. I can remember not believing before. I can remember saying *but it's fantastic*, just like I want to say it now."

"I know exactly how you feel," he said. "That's exactly how it was with me."

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"But, Tom . . ."

"Yes, Muffin?"

"Tom, if you're not . . . well, if you aren't cleared for death, then you must be alive."

"Well, no, Muffin. Not exactly. You see, I'm in Uncertainty."

"You mean they've got a cold storage room there, *too?*"

"Sort of. Yeah, come to think of it, it's quite a bit like that place in Connecticut. Remember? Guys sitting around waiting and beefing. Say, look there; it's almost light. I've got to get out of here. Write that name down for me, will you?"

"Why?"

"Why? So I won't forget it, that's why."

"I mean why do you have to get out? What does it matter if it's light or not?"

"Because I might be seen."

"Well, what if you were?"

"You don't understand. You get seen, you get questions started, and that puts you back to the beginning again, because it all goes in your file."

"What do you care?"

"Because I was already through the first six interviews before the IBM belched up that blank natal county, mother-in-law."

"Tom. *Listen to me.* What's the hurry? Why would you want to hurry it? It's death, isn't it, after all?"

He sat and looked at her for a long time. "I don't know, Muffin," he said. "I don't know why everybody there wants it, but they all seem to."

"All?" she said. "There are lots of them?"

"Sure. And they're all impatient. I don't know why. I never thought about it. They just want to get it over with, I guess. Some of them blow their tops and they get a phony notice all of a sudden. Man, they're so proud. They made it. They're really dead. Those sorry bastards. They give everybody the big handshake, see, and they go through this door and it just leads back to the beginning again. Pretty soon they show up at the first desk again, very quiet-type fellows all of a sudden."

She had never really been crafty before and she was surprised how easily it came to her. She began to chatter about Ed and Evvie and about the sympathy notes, and all the time she was moving about the room, pulling the cords on the venetian blinds, turning up the lights a little, silently flipping the night locks on the doors. Meanwhile, as she had hoped, Tom had got distracted by the sympathy notes.

"Hey," he said. "This one. Have you answered this one?"

"Which one, darling?"

"That sanctimonious hypocrite."

"Oh, him. No, I haven't."

"Good. This is one I want to answer myself. The opportunity of a —"

She had known the phone would ring as soon as Uncle George had had breakfast. He was so firm about

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believing one should get up out of bed and get the day started. Keep busy, that was the way.

"Tom, dear," she said, "would you mind? I know that's Uncle George and I really can't."

"Sure, honey," he said absent-mindedly. "I'll get it."

She stuffed a napkin in her mouth, knowing exactly how it would be.

"Hello? Uncle George? This is Tom. Hey, Uncle George? Are you there?"

She turned her head away and tried to control herself when Tom walked back in the room.

"Funny thing," he said. "Must have got cut off. Say, is the coffee still hot?"

"I'll make some fresh. Why, what happened?"

"There was a thud, sort of, and then — *My God, I forgot.*"

"Did you, dear?"

"This will cost me a thousand years in Uncertainty," he said.

"Well, was it worth it?" she asked.

He turned to her in anger and then it began to sneak out of him, that reluctant, devilish laugh that he had. Suddenly they were both of them howling like fools.

They had hold of something. Not that they knew what it was or understood it yet, but they were holding tight to it. They laughed until tears rolled down their cheeks and they fell down weakly on the couch and tumbled against one another like two rag dolls.

"God," Tom said. "I'm bushed. You know? I'm really beat."

"Of course you are, darling. Tell you what. Why don't you lie down right here for a little nap? I'll get a blanket for you."

When she came back he was lying on the couch and he mumbled sleepily while she took off his shoes. She put the blanket over him and hovered there a minute and then carefully tiptoed into the room where the telephone was. She had the tip of her tongue between her teeth while she eased the door shut so it would make no sound and then stealthily she dialed long distance.

"Mamma?" she said at last. "No, I'm all right. No, I don't care what time it is in Connecticut. Listen, Mamma. Would you do something for me absolutely and no questions asked? Mamma, do you promise? Well, promise. All right. I knew I could count on you. Now listen, Mamma. It's a matter of life and . . . It's important, Mamma. Now listen. No matter who asks you, you understand. No matter how many times. You were *not* born in Pasquotink County. Have you got it straight?"

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Once again the versatile Mr. Asimov switches from quarter-million-word transgalactic epics to the tidy limits of an ultra-short short-short, and reveals the truth behind one of Man's most cryptic symbols.

The Message

by ISAAC ASIMOV

THEY DRANK BEER AND REMINISCED as men will who have met after long separation. They called to mind the days under fire. They remembered sergeants and girls, both with exaggeration. Deadly things became humorous in retrospect and trifles disregarded for ten years were hauled out for an airing.

Including, of course, the perennial mystery.

"How do you account for it?" asked the first. "Who started it?"

The second shrugged. "No one started it. Everyone was doing it, like a disease. You, too, I suppose."

The first chuckled.

The third one said softly, "It became a sort of symbol to me. . . . Maybe because I came across it first when I was under fire for the first time. North Africa."

"Really?" said the second.

"The first night on the beaches of Oran. I was getting under cover, making for some native shack and I saw it in the light of a flare —"

* *

George was deliriously happy. Two years of red tape and now he was finally back in the past. Now he could complete his paper on the social life of the foot soldier of World War II with some authentic details.

Out of the warless, insipid society of the Thirtieth Century, he found himself for one glorious moment in the tense, superlative drama of the warlike Twentieth.

North Africa! Site of the first great sea-borne invasion of the war! How the temporal physicists had scanned the area for the perfect spot and moment. This shadow of an empty wooden building was it. No human being would approach for a known number of minutes. No blast would seriously affect it in that time. By being there, George would not affect history. He would be that ideal of the temporal physicist, the "pure observer."

It was even more terrific than he had imagined. There was the pert petual roar of artillery, the unseen

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tearing of planes overhead. There were the periodic lines of tracer bullets splitting the sky and the occasional ghastly glow of a flare.

And *he* was here! He, George, was part of the war, part of an intense kind of life forever gone from the world of the Thirtieth Century, grown tame and gentle.

He imagined he could see the shadows of an advancing column of soldiers, hear the low cautious monosyllables slip from one to another. How he longed to be one of them in truth, not merely a momentary intruder, a "pure observer"!

He stopped his note-taking and stared at his stylus, its micro-light hypnotizing him for a moment. A sudden idea had overwhelmed him and he looked at the wood against which his shoulder pressed. This moment must not pass unforgotten into history. Surely doing this would affect nothing. He would use the older English dialect and there would be no suspicion.

He did it quickly and then spied a soldier running desperately toward the structure, dodging a burst of bullets. George knew his time was up, and even as he knew it, found himself back in the Thirtieth Century.

It didn't matter. For those few minutes he had been part of World War II. A small part, but *part.* And others would know it. They might not know they knew it, but someone perhaps would repeat the message to himself.

Someone, perhaps that man running for shelter, would read it and know that along with all the heroes of the Twentieth Century was the "pure observer," the man from the Thirtieth Century, George Kilroy. *He* was there!

Note:

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Frederik Pohl is as good a candidate as you'll find for the title of the Compleat Science Fictionist. He has been an agent, a magazine editor, an actifan (active fan, for any non-fans in the audience), a writer (in every conceivable length, with at least seven pseudonyms and five collaborators), a book-reviewer, an anthologist . . . is there anything the man hasn't done? Of all his achievements, he is probably most noted for his novels in collaboration with C. M. Kornbluth, such as THE SPACE MERCHANTS *and* GLADIATOR-AT-LAW, *which are absolute models of the detailed, plausible creation of an ironically extrapolated future civilization. Now, to confirm his versatility and virtuosity, Mr. Pohl brings off the astonishing feat of a similar creation in under 3,000 words, with a complete story and character-portrait thrown in. I'm inclined to nominate this, Pohl's first story in these pages, as one of the most extraordinary jobs of effective conciseness in all of science fiction.*

The Census Takers

by FREDERIK POHL

IT GETS TO BE A MADHOUSE AROUND here along about the end of the first week. Thank heaven we only do this once a year, that's what I say! Six weeks on, and forty-six weeks off — that's pretty good hours, most people think. But they don't know what those six weeks are like.

It's bad enough for the field crews, but when you get to be an Area Boss like me it's frantic. You work your way up through the ranks, and then they give you a whole C.A. of your own; and you think you've got it made. Fifty three-man crews go out, covering the whole Census Area; a hundred and fifty men in the field, and twenty or thirty more in Area Command — and you boss them all. And everything looks great, until Census Period starts and you've got to work those hundred and fifty men; and six weeks is too unbearably long to live through, and too impossibly short to get the work done; and you begin living on black coffee and thiamin shots and dreaming about the vacation hostel on Point Loma.

Anybody can panic, when the pressure is on like that. Your best field men begin to crack up. But you

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can't afford to, because you're the Area Boss. . . .

Take Witeck. We were Enumerators together, and he was as good a man as you ever saw, absolutely nerveless when it came to processing the Overs. I counted on that man the way I counted on my own right arm; I always bracketed him with the greenest, shakiest new cadet Enumerators, and he never gave me a moment's trouble for years. Maybe it was too good to last; maybe I should have figured he would crack.

I set up my Area Command in a plush penthouse apartment. The people who lived there were pretty well off, you know, and they naturally raised the dickens about being shoved out. "Blow it," I told them. "Get out of here in five minutes, and we'll count you first." Well, that took care of *that;* they were practically kissing my feet on the way out. Of course, it wasn't strictly by the book, but you have to be a little flexible; that's why some men become Area Bosses, and others stay Enumerators.

Like Witeck.

Along about Day Eight things were really hotting up. I was up to my neck in hurry-ups from Regional Control — we were running a little slow — when Witeck called up. "Chief," he said, "I've got an In."

I grabbed the rotary file with one hand and a pencil with the other. "Blue card number?" I asked.

Witeck sounded funny over the phone. "Well, Chief," he said, "he doesn't have a blue card. He says —"

"No blue card?" I couldn't believe it. Come in to a strange C.A. without a card from your own Area Boss, and you're one In that's a cinch to be an Over. "What kind of a crazy C.A. does he come from, without a blue card?"

Witeck said, "He don't come from any C.A., Chief. He says —"

"You mean he isn't from this country?"

"That's right, Chief. He —"

"Hold it!" I pushed away the rotary file and grabbed the immigration roster. There were only a couple of dozen names on it, of course — we have enough trouble with our own Overs, without taking on a lot of foreigners, but still there were a handful every year who managed to get on the quotas. "I.D. number?" I demanded.

"Well, Chief," Witeck began, "he doesn't have an I.D. number. The way it looks to me —"

Well, you can fool around with these irregulars for a month, if you want to, but it's no way to get the work done. I said: "Over him!" and hung up. I was a little surprised, though; Witeck knew the ropes, and it wasn't like him to buck an irregular on to me. In the old days, when we were both starting out, I'd seen him Over a whole family just because the spelling of their names on their registry cards was different from the spelling on the checklist.

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But we get older. I made a note to talk to Witeck as soon as the rush was past. We were old friends; I wouldn't have to threaten him with being Overed himself, or anything like that. He'd know, and maybe that would be all he would need to snap him back. I certainly would talk to him, I promised myself, as soon as the rush was over, or anyway as soon as I got back from Point Loma.

I had to run up to Regional Control to take a little talking-to myself just then, but I proved to them that we were catching up and they were only medium nasty. When I got back Witeck was on the phone again. "Chief," he said, real unhappy, "this In is giving me a headache. I —"

"Witeck," I snapped at him, "are you bothering me with another In? Can't you handle anything by yourself?"

He said, "It's the same one, Chief. He says he's a kind of ambassador, and —"

"Oh," I said. "Well, why the devil don't you get your facts straight in the first place? Give me his name and I'll check his legation."

"Well, Chief," he began again, "he, uh, doesn't have any legation. He says he's from the —" he swallowed — "from the middle of the earth."

"You're crazy." I'd seen it happen before, good men breaking under the strain of census taking. They say in cadets that by the time you process your first five hundred Overs you've had it; either you take a voluntary Over yourself, or you split wide open and they carry you off to a giggle farm. And Witeck was past the five hundred mark, way past.

There was a lot of yelling and crying from the filter center, which I'd put out by the elevators, and it looked like Jumpers. I stabbed the transfer button on the phone and called to Carias, my number-two man: "Witeck's flipped or something. Handle it!"

And then I forgot about it, while Carias talked to Witeck on the phone; because it was Jumpers, all right, a whole family of them.

There was a father and a mother and five kids — *five* of them. Aren't some people disgusting? The field Enumerator turned them over to the guards — they were moaning and crying — and came up and gave me the story. It was bad.

"You're the head of the household?" I demanded of the man.

He nodded, looking at me like a sick dog. "We — we weren't Jumping," he whined. "Honest to heaven, mister — you've got to believe me. We were —"

I cut in, "You were packed and on the doorstep when the field crew came by. Right?" He started to say something, but I had him dead to rights. "That's plenty, friend," I told him. "That's Jumping, under the law: Packing, with intent to move, while a census Enumeration

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crew is operating in your locale. Got anything to say?"

Well, he had plenty to say, but none of it made any sense. He turned my stomach, listening to him. I tried to keep my temper — you're not supposed to think of individuals, no matter how worthless and useless and generally unfit they are; that's against the whole principle of the Census — but I couldn't help telling him: "I've met your kind before, mister. Five kids! If it wasn't for people like you we wouldn't *have* any Overs, did you ever think of that? Sure you didn't — you people never think of anything but yourself! Five kids, and then when Census comes around you think you can get smart and Jump." I tell you, I was shaking. "You keep your little beady eyes peeled, sneaking around, watching the Enumerators, trying to count how many it takes to make an Over; and then you wait until they get close to you, so you can Jump. Ever stop to think what trouble that makes for us?" I demanded. "Census is supposed to be fair and square, everybody an even chance — and how can we make it that way unless everybody stands still to be counted?" I patted Old Betsy, on my hip. "I haven't Overed anybody myself in five years," I told him, "but I swear, I'd like to handle you personally!"

He didn't say a word once I got started on him. He just stood there, taking it. I had to force myself to stop, finally; I could have gone on for a long time, because if there's one thing I hate it's these lousy, stinking breeders who try to Jump when they think one of them is going to be an Over in the count-off. Regular Jumpers are bad enough, but when it's the people who make the mess in the first place —

Anyway, time was wasting. I took a deep breath and thought things over. Actually, we weren't too badly off; we'd started off Overing every two-hundred-and-fiftieth person, and it was beginning to look as though our preliminary estimate was high; we'd just cut back to Overing every three-hundredth. So we had a little margin to play with.

I told the man, dead serious: "You know I could Over the lot of you on charges, don't you?" He nodded sickly. "All right, I'll give you a chance. I don't want to bother with the red tape; if you'll take a voluntary Over for yourself, we'll start the new count with your wife."

Call me soft, if you want to; but I still say that it was a lot better than fussing around with charges and a hearing. You get into a hearing like that and it can drag on for half an hour or more; and then Regional Control is on your tail because you're falling behind.

It never hurts to give a man a break, even a Jumper, I always say — as long as it doesn't slow down your Census.

Carias was waiting at my desk when I got back; he looked worried about

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something, but I brushed him off while I initialed the Overage report on the man we'd just processed. He'd been an In, I found out when I canceled his blue card. I can't say I was surprised. He'd come from Denver, and you know how they keep exceeding their Census figures; no doubt he thought he'd have a better chance in my C.A. than anywhere else. And no doubt he was right, because we certainly don't encourage breeders like him — actually, if he hadn't tried to Jump it was odds-on that the whole damned family would get by without an Over for years.

Carias was hovering right behind me as I finished. "I hate these voluntaries," I told him, basketing the canceled card. "I'm going to talk to Regional Control about it; there's no reason why they can't be processed like any other Over, instead of making me okay each one individually. Now, what's the matter?"

He rubbed his jaw. "Chief," he said, "it's Witeck."

"Now what? Another In?"

Carias glanced at me, then away. "Uh, no, Chief. It's the same one. He claims he comes from, uh, the center of the earth."

I swore out loud. "So he has to turn up in my C.A.!" I complained bitterly. "He gets out of the nuthouse, and right away —"

Carias said, "Chief, he might not be crazy. He makes it sound pretty real."

I said: "Hold it, Carias. Nobody can live in the center of the earth. It's solid, like a potato."

"Sure, Chief," Carias nodded earnestly. "But he says it isn't. He says there's a what he calls neutronium shell, whatever that is, with dirt and rocks on both sides of it. We live on the outside. He lives on the inside. His people —"

"Carias!" I yelled. "You're as bad as Witeck! This guy turns up, no blue card, no I.D. number, no credentials of any kind. What's he going to say, 'Please sir, I'm an Over, please process me'? Naturally not! So he makes up a crazy story, and you fall for it!"

"I know, Chief," Carias said humbly.

"Neutronium shell!" I would have laughed out loud, if I'd had the time. "Neutronium my foot! Don't you know it's *hot* down there?"

"He says it's hot neutronium," Carias said eagerly. "I asked him that myself, Chief. He said it's just the shell that —"

"Get back to work!" I yelled at him. I picked up the phone and got Witeck on his wristphone. I tell you, I was boiling. As soon as Witeck answered I lit into him; I didn't give him a chance to get a word in. I gave it to him up and down and sidewise; and I finished off by giving him a direct order. "You Over that man," I told him, "or I'll personally Over you! You hear me?"

There was a pause. Then Witeck said, "Jerry? Will you listen to me?"

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That stopped me. It was the first time in ten years, since I'd been promoted above him, that Witeck had dared call me by my first name. He said, "Jerry, listen. This is something big. This guy is really from the center of the earth, no kidding. He —"

"Witeck," I said, "you've cracked."

"No, Jerry, honest! And it worries me. He's right there in the next room, waiting for me. He says he had no idea things were like this on the surface; he's talking wild about cleaning us off and starting all over again; he says —"

"*I* say he's an Over!" I yelled. "No more talk, Witeck. You've got a direct order — now carry it out!"

So that was that.

We got through the Census Period, after all, but we had to do it shorthanded; and Witeck was hard to replace. I'm a sentimentalist, I guess, but I couldn't help remembering old times. We started even; he might have risen as far as I — but of course he made his choice when he got married and had a kid; you can't be a breeder and an officer of the Census both. If it hadn't been for his record he couldn't even have stayed on as an Enumerator.

I never said a word to anyone about his crackup. Carias might have talked, but after we found Witeck's body I took him aside. "Carias," I said reasonably, "we don't want any scandal, do we? Here's Witeck, with an honorable record; he cracks, and kills himself, and that's bad enough. We won't let loose talk make it worse, will we?"

Carias said uneasily, "Chief, where's the gun he killed himself with? His own processor wasn't even fired."

You can let a helper go just so far. I said sharply, "Carias, we still have at least a hundred Overs to process. You can be on one end of the processing — or you can be on the other. You understand me?"

He coughed. "Sure, Chief. I understand. We don't want any loose talk."

And that's how it is when you're an Area Boss. But I didn't ever get my vacation at Point Loma; the tsunami there washed out the whole town the last week of Census. And when I tried Baja California, they were having that crazy volcanic business; and the Yellowstone Park bureau wouldn't even accept my reservation because of some trouble with the geysers, so I just stayed home. But the best vacation of all was just knowing that the Census was done for another year.

Carias was all for looking for this In that Witeck was talking about, but I turned him down. "Waste of time," I told him. "By now he's a dozen C.A.'s away. We'll never see him again, him or anybody like him — I'll bet my life on that."

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